

EUROPEAN POULTRY SECTOR: A GLOBAL CHALLENGE AGAINST ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

Follow up of the Euractiv debate “Reducing the use of antibiotics in the meat sector”

Brussels, Thursday 21st April 2021 – During a debate organized by EURACTIV, the EU Poultry sector demonstrated its common interest in preventing a global health crisis stemming from antimicrobial resistance. According to the World Health Organization, this is one of the top ten global rising threats for animal and human health. Significant progress has already been achieved, and further aspirations are outlined in the Farm to Fork Strategy, which aims at reducing the sales of antimicrobials for farmed animals by 50% by 2030. Actors of the EU Poultry sector join forces to increase awareness at all levels of the meat production chain. The idea is not to ban the use of antibiotics, but to advocate a responsible use in accordance with the European guidelines.

An animated debate with a unique conclusion: holistic health approach

The use of antibiotics in animal agriculture is continuously debated. Different experts presented their views during the conference, namely Andrea Gavinelli, Head of Unit at the European Commission for Animal welfare and antimicrobial resistance; Sarah Wiener MEP, Member of the European Parliament, of AGRI, and Substitute of ENVI and IMCO; Eran Raizman, Senior Animal Health & Production Officer from FAO; Roxane Feller, Secretary General of AnimalhealthEurope; and Lara Sanfrancesco, Director of Unaitalia and AVEC member. The overall ambition of all the panelists is oriented in the same direction: embracing a holistic health approach. The outbreak of covid-19 brought to light both the resilience of and the challenges to the EU food system in facing a crisis head on. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is similarly a global issue. All panelists agreed that only a holistic approach could bring relevant advances in minimizing antimicrobial resistance. This is what our experts call a “One Health Approach”.

Use antibiotics “As little as possible but as much as necessary”

The world cannot avoid antibiotic uses as they remain of the only effective way to treat bacterial for illnesses in both humans and animals. Nevertheless, we can decrease the need to use antibiotics. A key point of the discussion was the strategy of focusing on improving animal health and reducing the need for antibiotics in the livestock sector. This could be achieved by adopting general prevention measures. Prevention is performed at different stages: by raising awareness among different stakeholders; by monitoring antimicrobial use and analyzing bacteria’s antimicrobial resistance in the laboratory; and by promoting good practices thus improving animal health. With this vision, the 11 years monitoring of European sales of veterinary antibiotics demonstrated an overall reduction in sales of 34%.

Improving awareness through communication: a success for Italy

The EU poultry sector progresses well in the reduction of the use of antibiotics and the Italian poultry sector, represented by Lara Sanfrancesco, Secretary General of the Italian Poultry Association Unaitalia during the debate, presented outstanding results. They reduced the use of antibiotics by 82% in recent years. The key role of the Italian success was played by an accurate action plan, operating at all levels of the poultry production chain. The starting idea aimed at the promotion of a cultural change of farming management. To reach these results, the Italian Poultry Association trained and informed

farmers about the benefits, profitable effects, and positive impact of this new approach. In order to be successful, this approach requires an interconnection among the players of the chain, essential to assure the sharing of technologies and good agricultural and breeding practices. As stated by Lara Sanfrancesco, “the Italian experience proved the importance of creating a continuous dialogue among stakeholders (farmers, experts, politicians, public authorities, ...), without forgetting the consumers, who are also an important part of the chain”.

The EU as a role model

The EU is making progress reducing the use of antibiotics in animals thanks to years of promoting responsible use and monitoring the sales of veterinary antibiotics, and by providing efficient means, systems and services to concerned sectors. European countries, such as Sweden or Denmark, led the way by banning use of antibiotics for growth promotion in the late 90's. The EU generalized this ban in 2006 and the USA finally followed in 2017. These good practices can be shared with more non-European countries to ensure a global effort. For instance, it is not possible to get antibiotics without a prescription in the EU while there are still neighbouring countries with no surveillance at all. Access to veterinarians and use of vaccines, which can play a preventive role, are more readily available in the EU but often not in most middle- and low-income countries where there is a need to reinforce animal health policies but most of all to provide suitable and efficient services. As mentioned by Andrea Gavinelli, the EU is clearly one of the leading players in this area, but bilateral talks and agreements are essential in order to reach the EU targets.

Would you like to learn more about animal welfare and sustainability in EU poultry production, about the nutritional benefits of poultry meat, or the many ways to prepare it?

Press contact

SOPEXA Belgium
Romain NEURAY
Phone: +32 2 512 69 79
rneuray@sopexa.com

Contact AVEC

AVEC Secretariat
Nadia KHALDOUNE
Phone: +32 2 238 10 80
nk@avec-poultry.eu

The content of this promotion campaign represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission and the Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency (CHAFAEA) do not accept any responsibility for any use that may be made of the information it contains.