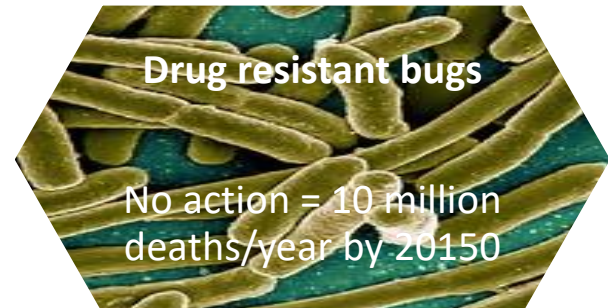


Reducing antibiotic use: Case report from a Dutch pig farm

Josh Onyango, Livestock Health Consultant, Published on 07 August 2017

Why action is needed:

Antibiotic resistance remains to be one of the greatest public health threat of our times. It has been projected that the problem will result in 10 million deaths per year globally by 2050 if we don't act now. Several EU countries have risen to this challenge, among them the Netherlands, where the government has been working with farmers for the past nine years on strategies for reducing antibiotic usage in livestock production.



The effort has been worthwhile with farms reporting up to 60% drop in antibiotic use. Here we report findings from a leading Dutch pig farm during a visit by Innovation for Agriculture in June 2017.

“Cutting down on antibiotic usage without compromising on animal welfare is something all farmers can achieve,” Dutch pig farmer Henk Roefs said. Mr Roefs shared how he has managed to cut down on antibiotic usage to 90 percent in the last 10 years in his pig unit which comprises of 5000 fatteners, 2500 weaners and 750 sows.

Key management tips

Starting with healthy pigs

Mr Roefs explained that he had to start with pigs which were free from most pig diseases. This was achieved by sourcing pigs from reputable breeders in the past 13 years. In addition, he also sought technical advice from pig health experts, including from those working at research institutions. He stresses that as long as you start healthy and follow high standard farm management routines, it is very unlikely that you will encounter many pig health challenges which would require use of antibiotics.

Biosecurity

“The majority of pig diseases can only be brought into the farm from external sources” that’s according to Mr Roefs. He is obsessive about biosecurity with very strict measures in place, among these include:

- All visitors must have not been to other pig farms 48 hours prior to visit to the farm.
- Contacting companies are not allowed to return pigs following purchase and loading into trucks has occurred. Planning from truck companies is key to avoiding any purchased pigs returned to the farm.
- Keep the main door to the offices and pig buildings under 24 hour lock.
- Only purchase semen from reputable suppliers.
- Use of overalls and boots whose colours correspond to different zones, helping control the spread of diseases, for example, red – for piglets group, blue – for weaners, yellow – for fatteners, green – for pregnant sows.
- All staff must shower at the start of morning routines.
- No coming out of the pig building until 4 pm (a small kitchen available for coffee break and lunch). This minimise on the risk of infection an employee might bring into the farm by coming out of the pig building.

Staff education

“Educating staff working with pigs is key to getting things right explains” Mr Roefs. This should include aspects of importance of biosecurity, simple health checks among others. In addition, all staff working at the farm have a formal training in pig production.

Management at weaning

Weaning is carried out when the piglets are 4 weeks old. Mr Roefs employ a number a number of management practices post weaning which has helped reduce post weaning problems. The piglets are divided into five groups with group one having the best/healthiest pigs (scoring based on weight and general outlook). The feed is moist while there is also hand feeding of the majority of piglets in the different groups at least 6 times a day.



“ Having a closed flock and starting with healthy is key to minimising on the spread of infectious diseases” concluded Mr Roefs.

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