

Industry Workshop Round Table Discussion On Antibiotic Usage Livestock

Published on 08 August 2017

Industry leading experts and other stakeholders gathered at Innovation for Agriculture in Warwickshire on May 2017 to discuss on challenges and solutions in tackling antibiotic use in the livestock sector.

1. Opportunities for improved surveillance

Opportunities for improved surveillance were discussed, and how surveillance was not an area mentioned in the O'Neil report as something agriculture needs to focus on. There was also mention of negative impacts of closing the Veterinary Investigation centre microbiology labs. The industry needs to work collaboratively to pull together the work in the private sector. The possibilities of funding for disease surveillance from the private sector were discussed; in particular the fact that each industry has a supply chain with an incentive to improve animal health and welfare.

2. Mechanisms to encourage farmers to participate in reducing antibiotic use.

Attendees explained that pig producers reacted after seeing the reality of their usage in black and white, on paper. Different drivers of enforcing acceptance of change were discussed including retailer and supply chain pressure (top down driving force), government pulling away the safety net, benchmarking farms against each other and making it personal to the farmer. The overall residing factor was that the industry needs a uniform, standardised way, and the government can assist with the speed of implementing it. Everyone agreed that to make a change in the industry we need skilled stockman. The status of the stockman has been devalued. The industry needs to upskill farmers and make it a profession again.

3. Making data available in the public domain

There were discussions about whether or not data should be made available in the public domain. It was unanimous that forums need to be arranged with discussion where the information is protected or released in an educated form.

4. Variety of recording systems now available

A major issue raised in the workshop was the wide variety of recording systems now available. An attendee quoted that there were 21 different veterinary surveillance recording farm systems. The industry needs to collect all the data from the different sources and analyse it to get accurate figures on each species antibiotic usage. The industry needs to be realistic on what it can achieve. Concerns were raised about communicating with the bottom 20% of farmers; they won't engage and won't accept they need to change – the industry has limited resources and time to tackle antimicrobial resistance (AMR) – will these resources be wasted on those bottom tier farmers. Thoughts were unanimous in the workshop that the industry needs to lead by example and promote what is possible.

5. Practical strategies that can be implemented on farms

a) A simple labelling system

Discussions began to unfold about a simple labelling system e.g. different coloured lids for antibiotic drugs. This needs to be unified across all species, and the label needs to be present at the point of use.

b) *The prospects of smart technologies for drug administration*

There was discussion on prospects of smart technologies for drug administration e.g. automatic dosing, remote access from the vet practice to calculate doses and administration of drugs with no contact with the operator.

c) *Vaccines*

The area of vaccines, and whether incorrect vaccine usage is contributing to AMR was discussed. The industry needs better education on vaccines and vaccine handling – this is currently available from Responsible use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) and needs to be disseminated.

d) *Biosecurity*

Biosecurity and the lack of education and awareness of biosecurity outside the perimeter of a farm was discussed. It was discussed that the sheep industry is the most difficult to influence. All farms need to take measures proportional to the risk but tailored to the farm. Leading on from biosecurity, topics of discussion turned to changing views on a clean environment. Viewpoints on sterile environments need to change. A few of the right bugs are good for an environment. There is need to enhance what is available on farms, and manage susceptible populations.

e) *Early disease detection with technologies*

In the dairy sector sensor technologies are used to monitor rumination, body temperature, eating time and lying time – can we use this to decide when to treat, what to treat with and when to stop antibiotic treatment. Several technologies for early disease detection are also currently available in the poultry sector. There is need for physical and production data needs to go further.

6. What can each industry learn from each other

The final topic on the agenda was ‘what can each industry learn from each other’. There is a definite need for a national database - the electronic medicine book set up for the pig sector has experienced a high level of uptake – this recording system needs to be replicated in other species sectors. Ideally, this will be a one input system, for ease of recording for farmers, and the information will be automatically disseminated.

Target task forces need to be implemented, with a vet and farmer for each sector present at facilitated meetings around the country. The best method of uptake of change is best advocate – producers talking to producers. We need to find people who are willing to be spokespeople, who have had personal experience and case studies, to engage others.

For more information on this article, please contact Josh Onyango, Livestock Health Consultant, E: josho@i4agri.org.

For general information, please contact Innovation for Agriculture, Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, CV8 2LZ, E: info@i4agri.org T: 02476 692 470 W: <http://www.innovationforagriculture.org.uk/>