



CALL TO SHEEP SECTOR TO DEMONSTRATE RESPONSIBLE USE OF ANTIBIOTICS

Farmers, vets and advisors across the UK sheep sector are being asked to help a new industry-led stewardship group demonstrate how they are using antibiotics responsibly throughout the sheep industry.

A new and standardised way to measure the amount of antibiotics used on farm (the metrics) have been released by the Sheep Antibiotic Guardian Group (SAGG), a sub-group of the Sheep Health and Welfare Group (SHAWG). SAGG has worked closely with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, academics and vets to identify these measures, and is now urging all those who work in the sheep sector to support farmers in capturing the information.

Sheep vet Fiona Lovatt, and a member of SAGG, explains that the new system is a practical, farm-friendly version of the EU metrics that are already used at a national level.

“We use two measures of antibiotic use and the same definitions that are already used to calculate national use figures in the EU countries except that the population corrected unit (PCU) is replaced by kg. This will make the figure more appropriate for sheep farmers and vets to use.

“We recommend each flock captures and calculates these in the same way so that farmers and vets can compare use on different farms and different systems and measure changes over time.”

The first metric is total antibiotic used for the flock divided by the number of ewes and lambs in the flock, adjusted for weight. The second metric looks at the total antibiotic treatment days for lambs less than a week old, divided by the total number of lambs born on the farm. This second measurement is designed to trigger important vet-farmer conversations with respect to good practice in the lambing shed.

Dr Lovatt says the new metrics work alongside an updated set of guidelines on responsible use of medicines in sheep, also released this week. Used together, she hopes they will start to provide a consistent structure to measuring antibiotic use and will eventually allow the sector to demonstrate its achievements more clearly alongside key target areas to improve.

“Two separate studies, that have looked at around 200 sheep-only farms, suggest the majority of producers are low users, but the studies also show a tail end of very high users. Producers and vets can only know where they are and drive improvements if they measure their own use and compare against others.

“The next step will be collecting and collating the data in an anonymised way. But for now, if all those working with sheep farmers can get behind this initiative and start measuring use with these metrics, it will be a big leap forward.”

The new guidelines and metrics can be downloaded from www.shawg.org.uk.

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Notes to editors

SHAWG is an independent body with membership that reflects the range of organisations involved in the sheep industry. SAGG works as a sub-group of SHAWG, aiming to progress the delivery of targets as defined by the RUMA's Targets Task Force in 2017. It is led by Dr Lovatt with sheep producer and SHAWG chairman, Charles Sercombe. Group membership includes: National Sheep Association (NSA), Sheep Veterinary Society (SVS), National Farmers Union (NFU), Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), Quality Meat Scotland (QMS), Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) and RUMA.