

## **New ‘white paper’ aims to boost confidence around farm antibiotic data**

**Improving how the food and farming industry uses farm antibiotic data could unlock huge opportunities for UK farmers, including increased market access, better disease prevention and improved sustainability.**

This is the vision set out in a new ‘white paper’ published today (7 May) by the Vet Schools Council (VSC) and the Food Industry Initiative on Antimicrobials (FIIA).

The paper examines why there are barriers to collecting and sharing data on where and when different antibiotics are used, and asks how this can be changed in order to safeguard farmers’ interests around data while reducing the spread of antibiotic resistance.

The report reaches three conclusions about what is needed: appropriate protocols on data use that can be easily observed by all parties; a better understanding of the barriers to improved use of data – by sector and supply chain; and agreement on how to publish data in the safest and fairest way.

James Wood, infectious disease epidemiologist at the University of Cambridge’s vet school, chairs the VSC’s antimicrobial resistance sub-group (VSC-AMR). He says the opportunities presented by better antibiotic data remain largely unrecognised within UK food and farming.

“Antibiotic resistance is already a ‘slow-moving’ pandemic fuelled by inappropriate or unnecessary use of antibiotics in human and veterinary medicine,” says Professor Wood.

“The UK has led globally in voluntary reductions of antibiotic use on farms, halving sales over the past decade to among the lowest in Europe. There is so much more that can be done using data, however – such as modelling evolving disease patterns and resistance so we can anticipate and proactively manage infection in animals.”

Kristen Reyher, Professor of Veterinary Epidemiology and Population Health at the University of Bristol, who is a member of VSC-AMR and has worked closely with FIIA, says the aims could be even more ambitious.

“Data on antibiotic use and prescriptions in all sectors could include details of the conditions being targeted and the effectiveness of the treatment,” she explains.

“This could then be combined with disease and resistance surveillance data to help identify patterns. We have a chance to be world-leading in this area, safeguarding these valuable medicines for where they will be most needed – but only if we can work together using data.”

Gavin Morris, Animal Welfare Manager for meat processor Dunbia and President of the Veterinary Public Health Association, led the contribution to the report from the FIIA. He says part of the report focuses on the lack of national antibiotic data in the dairy, beef and sheep sectors, and examines the implications.

“Until we know what antibiotics UK dairy, beef and sheep farming are using at a national level – as we do in other sectors – we can’t prove the efforts going into antibiotic stewardship. This becomes especially important when considering our competitors in Europe and around the world, where this type of data collection is now being mandated nationally,” he says.

“The good news is we do now have ‘Medicine Hub’, an online platform managed by levy board AHDB on behalf of the farming industry to collate cattle and sheep antibiotic usage data from a variety of sources. It works alongside systems in each of the devolved nations, such as Welsh Lamb & Beef Producers’ antimicrobial use calculator.

“However, to be fully engaged, farmers and vets need to understand the benefits of collating data in the first place.”

Dr Morris believes that many of the barriers to collaborating and making better use of data can be overcome if the shared benefits are recognised.

“We know some farmers are concerned they will be judged or penalised if they share information on antibiotic treatments. FIIA members in food processing and retail recognise this, and have agreed a code of conduct on data access and use. Despite this, we need to do more to build confidence – which is why this white paper is so important.”

The collaboration between VSC-AMR and FIIA on the paper started two years ago after a report from a campaign group raised concerns from both parties about how the group had misrepresented data on antibiotic use in different supply chains. The two organisations decided to collaborate on a piece of work identifying what good data management looked like and could offer the industry – and this is the result.

The report is available to download from both the FIIA ([www.fia.co.uk/news](http://www.fia.co.uk/news)) and VSC ([www.vetschoolscouncil.ac.uk](http://www.vetschoolscouncil.ac.uk)) websites. A shorter simplified version summarising the key points is also available.

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