THE ALLIANCE TO SAVE OUR ANTIBIOTICS

A world without effective antibiotics is a terrifying but real prospect. Now, the indiscriminate over-use of antibiotics in human and animal medicine means it may no longer be a question of if, but when.

Save Our Antibiotics

The situation is so acute that the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Margaret Chan, has warned of *'a post-antibiotic era, in which many common infections will no longer have a cure and once again, kill unabated.'* (7th April 2011)

We have formed a new Alliance to 'Save Our Antibiotics'. Three established organisations are joining forces to halt the indiscriminate use of these vital products and highlight a better way forward to protect human and animal health for the future.

- Compassion in World Farming
- Sustain
- Soil Association

Farm animals consume nearly half of all the antibiotics produced worldwide.

Over-use of antibiotics (especially low doses or incomplete courses) is the main reason for the increase in antibiotic resistance, which makes antibiotics ineffective just when they are most needed. Human antibiotic over-use may well be the chief culprit, but in intensive animal farming ('factory farming') there are practices that we assert are unethical and irresponsible.

The Alliance asserts that the reason antibiotics are being over-used is that factory-farmed animals are at high risk of infection. This is because they:

- live caged, confined or penned in crowded, stressful conditions;
- are weaned very early;
- are often physiologically stretched to the limit to maximise productivity.

All this can suppress animals' immune systems, so factory farming often relies on preventive use of antibiotics instead, to compensate for poor conditions where animals are likely to become sick. **But there are viable, alternative models of good animal health.**

PHOTO: COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING / MARTIN USBORNE

The Alliance suggests that antibiotics are being used to prop up a 'sickness-inducing environment', i.e. to prevent animals from becoming sick due to the conditions in which they are forced to live.

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Soil Association healthy soil, healthy people, healthy planet

ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANCE: QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What is the 'post antibiotic era'?

Our antibiotics are failing to keep pace with the speed at which bacteria are adapting to resist them. This means, simply put, that we could run out of antibiotics that are effective on septicaemia, tuberculosis, pneumonia, syphilis, gonorrhea and meningitis, and live in a time when antibiotics no longer work against dangerous bacterial diseases and infections.

Can our antibiotics be 'saved'?

Effective antibiotics can be conserved for longer if they are used responsibly. Our campaign is calling for a phased reduction of overall antibiotic use on farms, for an EU-wide ban on certain types of use in farm animals, and the restricted use of specific 'critically important' antibiotics.

Why the focus on animal medicine?

The medical profession is already acting to reduce reliance on antibiotics for minor conditions. Our Alliance is formed of three organisations that are active in the farming and food sectors. We hope to help focus the emerging concerns from consumers and from the health, medical and veterinary sectors, and point the way to better use of antibiotics in the farming sector.

Does feeding farm animals antibiotics mean antibiotics are being left in our food?

There may occasionally be antibiotic 'residues' in foods. This separate issue is not the focus of our campaign, but is examined on page 28 of the report.

Key recommendations to Save Our Antibiotics

A new report for the Alliance draws together evidence from research and official studies. It offers key recommendations for curbing antibiotic use in farming in the EU.

REDUCTION STRATEGY

The European Commission and Member States must urgently develop a more robust strategy to reduce antibiotic use in agriculture to a minimum. It should include the following:

- a target to reduce overall antibiotic use on EU farms by 50% by 2015;
- specific controls on the use in livestock of 'critically important' human antibiotics;
- closing the loophole whereby antibiotics can still be used as growth promoters on farm animals in the EU.

The Alliance is not calling for a total withdrawal of all antibiotic treatment of animals. On the contrary, we believe it is vital to maintain the effectiveness of antibiotics for treating actual sick animals, so reducing suffering and maintaining good welfare.

PHOTO: © PHOTOTAKE INC. / ALAMY

Certain E.coli bacteria can produce ESBLs, enzymes that make them resistant to a whole class of antibiotics.

FUTURE DIRECTION

The EU should take action to end the misuse of antibiotics in farming and ensure animals are reared and kept in conditions that allow them to be naturally healthy.

VETERINARY SURGEONS

Vets would shoulder most responsibility for implementing a reduction strategy, which should focus on good animal welfare, not routine medication, to ensure full health.

FARMERS

Farmers should be encouraged (through financial incentives under agricultural policy) to shift to higher welfare farming systems that are less dependent on antibiotic use. In other words, away from factory farming to more sustainable and humane forms of animal husbandry, such as extensive grassland rearing or integrated crop-livestock farming.

PRICING

Retailers can pay farmers prices that enable them to supply meat and dairy products from farming systems that require minimal use of antibiotics, and maintain high welfare standards.

Please go to ciwf.org/antibiotics to read the full report, *Case Study of a Health Crisis*, which includes the references for information contained in this brochure.

OFFICIAL FINDINGS SUGGEST DECISIVE ACTION IS ESSENTIAL

"The widespread use of antimicrobials ... in livestock production has intensified the risk for the emergence and spread of resistant micro-organisms."

World Health Organization, 2007

"Humans may be exposed to animal bacteria with resistance genes ... these genes can be transferred to bacteria with potential to cause infections in humans."

European Medicines Agency, 2009

"There seems to be no significant decrease in the consumption of antibiotics in the veterinary sector, which continue to be used systematically for 'prophylactic' purposes due to unsustainable agricultural practices."

Resolution of Environment Committee of the European Parliament, Oct 2011

PHOTO: © ZAK WATERS / ALAMY

The appearance of virulent strains of 'pig' MRSA in the community is a 'matter of time', according to Dutch scientists.

CASE STUDY OF A HEALTH CRISIS

How human health is under threat from over-use of antibiotics in intensive livestock farming

A report for the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics

This report, produced for the Alliance by Compassion in World Farming, is now available to download at ciwf.org/antibiotics.

Citing field studies and lab analysis, the report draws together convincing evidence that over-use of antibiotics in farm animals has already resulted in the following:

- farm animals have become breeding grounds for antibiotic-resistant strains of *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter* and *E. coli;*
- farm animals are harbouring antibiotic-resistant strains of MRSA that could become virulent;

and has contributed to:

- the diminishing effectiveness in human medicine of critically important antibiotics such as cephalosporins.

This report:

- identifies the most objectionable current practices;
- makes key recommendations for immediate restrictions;
- proposes a viable alternative model of good animal health.

For more information on this report or to join the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics (organisations only), please contact:
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