

**Press Release**  
**25<sup>th</sup> October, 2018**

**Today, EU Parliament voted to ban preventative mass medication of groups of healthy farm animals**

New legislation aimed at ending the overuse of antibiotics in farming has been approved by the European Parliament today. The legislation will ban the preventative mass medication of groups of healthy animals, which has been used for decades to compensate for poor husbandry, low animal welfare and high levels of stress and disease in intensive farming [1][2].

Cóilín Nunan, Campaign Manager for the Alliance to Save our Antibiotics, said: “This is a hugely important breakthrough for human and animal health and is by far the more serious attempt that Europe has ever made to achieve responsible antibiotic use in farming. Farming accounts for about two thirds of all antibiotic use in Europe [3], so if the legislation is implemented correctly, we should be seeing very large reductions in use in years to come. Without the prop of routine antibiotic medication, farmers will also have to re-think their husbandry methods, and adopt healthier and more sustainable farming practices.”

Unfortunately, the UK Government may choose to allow preventative mass medication to continue. The EU’s landmark legislation will only come into force in 2022, post-Brexit, and Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, said that during the negotiations over the regulations, the UK “did voice concerns about the restriction of prophylaxis to individual animals” [4].

The Government says it intends to implement the provisions of the new legislation, but refuses to accept that the EU legislation bans preventative group treatments [4][5]. The Government’s Veterinary Medicines Directorate claimed, incorrectly, that the legislation is ambiguous and does not restrict the administration preventative treatments to individual animals [6]. Michael Gove said that the Government will “work constructively with stakeholders to agree how these restrictions can be implemented in practice” [4], which suggests that there is no guarantee the UK will in practice ban preventative group treatments.

Cóilín Nunan said: “The Government must commit to banning preventative group treatments. The latest data shows that the UK farming industry is making good progress in reducing its antibiotic use, and the poultry industry has even voluntarily banned group prevention. If the government rejects the EU ban, the UK could end up with some of the weakest regulatory standards in Europe, which will raise questions about the kinds of trade deals we will be seeking with non-EU countries that often use much higher levels of antibiotics in farming. Importing low-quality meat produced with high levels of antibiotics will inevitably undermine UK progress.”

The EU’s position on farm antibiotic use is now largely consistent with that of the World Health Organization, which last year produced excellent guidelines on farm antibiotic use calling for an end to preventative group treatments worldwide [7]. In contrast to the EU, the US Department of Agriculture strongly attacked the WHO guidelines, as the US supports continued use of preventative mass medication [8].

Cóilín Nunan said: “According to the latest estimates, 73% of world antibiotics are used in farming [9]. This should be of concern to all Europeans as we know that antibiotic resistance does not

respect borders. The EU must now use its collective power, alongside the WHO, to push for tighter regulation of global farm antibiotic use, or else we will be soon facing into the post-antibiotic era.”

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### Notes to Editors

- [1] Under the EU legislation, preventative antibiotic treatments for individual animals will still be permitted in exceptional circumstances where the risk of disease is high, for example when a cow has a caesarean. Group treatments will also be allowed if disease has been diagnosed in some of the animals and there is a high risk it will spread to others, and no alternative treatments are available. The legislation also includes new powers to completely exclude the use of certain last-resort antibiotics in human medicine from use in farming.
- [2] The new EU legislation still needs to be formally approved by the Council of the European Union, but provisional approval by the Council was given earlier this year.
- [3] <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2017.4872>
- [4] Letter from Michael Gove MP to Zac Goldsmith MP, October 2018
- [5] <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-10-08/176052/>
- [6] Veterinary Medicines Directorate Stakeholder meeting, July 2018
- [7] <http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/07-11-2017-stop-using-antibiotics-in-healthy-animals-to-prevent-the-spread-of-antibiotic-resistance>
- [8] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-23/trump-s-usda-fights-global-guidelines-on-livestock-antibiotics>
- [9] <https://cddep.org/blog/posts/global-plan-cut-antimicrobial-use-animals/>
- [10] The [Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics](#) is an alliance of health, medical, civil society and animal welfare groups campaigning to stop the overuse of antibiotics in animal farming. It was founded by [Compassion in World Farming](#), the [Soil Association](#) and [Sustain](#) in 2009. Our vision is a world in which human and animal health and well-being are protected by food and farming systems that do not rely on routine antibiotic use.