

## RESPONSIBLE USE OF MEDICINES IN AGRICULTURE (RUMA) ALLIANCE

### ANTIBIOTIC USE IN ANIMALS

#### **Background**

1. The RUMA Alliance was formed in 1998 to focus co-operation between the many diverse elements of the ‘farm to fork’ process in promoting best practice in the use of antimicrobials in food animal production. It recognised that any legislative or behavioural changes in the light of concerns about antimicrobial resistance needed to be measured and gradual, hence the title of this paper. Balancing the protection of animal health, animal welfare, and food safety with antimicrobial resistance were the paramount considerations. On the basis of these criteria RUMA has produced and kept up to date responsible use guidelines for antimicrobials, as well as for antiparasitics, and anthelmintics, in the major farmed species, which also promote on-farm management practices which minimise the need for medicines.
2. The thrust of RUMA has always been in the direction of policy not politics, and the discussion and communication of strategy options with National Authorities, consumers, and the media. Close links with the European Platform for RUMA (EPRUMA) give RUMA invaluable contact with relevant interests in the European Union.
3. We believe that there would be benefit to be gained from the establishment of similar multi-disciplinary co-operation in other parts of Europe, and RUMA has presented its experience in a number of EU member states in recent years.

#### **The issues**

1. Antimicrobial resistance affects us all, and we welcome Commissioner Dalli’s comment in the French Parliament that antimicrobials are necessary for use in animals if the right balance can be found. The RUMA Alliance is all about identifying this balance, which requires that management of antimicrobial resistance must be firmly based on the available scientific evidence and not driven by dogma or political expediency. Like all animal medicines, antimicrobials should be used as little as possible but as much as necessary.
2. Part of this imperative is to try to ensure that by tackling resistance we can retain the efficacy of available antimicrobials.

#### **The RUMA Guidelines**

1. These give primacy to on-farm practice which promotes health in all its aspects. They provide clear and practical guidance on use for both veterinarians and farmers, and are freely available on the RUMA website.
2. It is difficult to gauge the impact of RUMA’s guidelines, but comparatively low levels of MRSA in UK pig herds may be one positive indication. A proper ‘cause and effect’ study is on the long list of projects that RUMA has lined up.

## **What can we do?**

1. Responsible use of antimicrobials means that treatment of bacterial diseases should not always involve the newer generation of antimicrobials where older, more conventional, products are as effective. We should accept that, for example, use of fluoroquinolones for E.coli mastitis and ceftiofur for foot rot in cattle do not represent responsible use.
2. We must move away from the use of last resort/human critical drugs as front line treatments. This also applies to in-ovo/day-old chick use in broilers of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation cephalosporins at the time of Marek's disease vaccination. Dairy cattle use, to avoid milk withholding, might be another example. These are valuable antimicrobials and their availability for use in animals needs to be retained.
3. Regulation must be based on sound, scientific, risk assessment and not on inappropriate application of the precautionary principle.
4. Use must be according to the label. The cascade should be an exception.
5. Extend the laudable Commission initiative to provide funds for training and education on responsible use of antimicrobials for professionals in the field of human medicines to those involved in veterinary sector.

## **Conclusion**

1. We must all recognise the risks to both animals and humans from antimicrobial resistance, and work together to minimise them.
2. Antimicrobials are essential for the treatment of farm animals to ensure the supply of safe food while maintaining animal health and welfare throughout the European Union.
3. The HMA and EMA reflective papers recommend that responsible use be a core part of AMR control.
4. One way to achieve this would be for all member states to introduce (if they haven't already done so) RUMA type guidelines tuned to the appropriate husbandry practices.
5. The key to minimising resistance at grass roots level is not so much 'what' antimicrobials are used, but 'how and when' they are used.

October 2011