

Utrecht, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015

Re: SDa report *Usage of Antibiotics in Agricultural Livestock in the Netherlands in 2014 - Trends and benchmarking of livestock farms and veterinarians*

Dear Sir or Madam,

It is with great pleasure that the Netherlands Veterinary Medicines Authority (SDa) presents its report *Usage of Antibiotics in Agricultural Livestock in the Netherlands in 2014*. The purpose of this report is to provide insight into usage of antibiotics in the Dutch veal, poultry, cattle and pig farming sectors. The SDa is now able to report on several years' worth of antibiotic usage data of over 41,000 livestock farms as well as veterinarians' prescription patterns, thanks to efforts of livestock farmers and veterinarians. By benchmarking livestock farms and veterinarians, and implementing improvement measures and policy changes if necessary, we strive to further reduce the usage of antibiotics in the Dutch livestock sector and help minimize the development of antibiotic resistance.

Results of the SDa expert panel's analyses regarding the usage of antibiotics in 2014  
*Developments in overall usage of antimicrobial agents*

Based on its analyses of data provided by the various livestock sectors, the SDa expert panel has concluded in its accompanying report that after years of substantial reductions, overall usage of antibiotics demonstrated little further improvement over the 2013-2014 period. The 2014 sales figures for antibiotics for veterinary use also indicate that the downward trend in usage levels is leveling off. Compared to 2009, sales of antibiotics for veterinary use have decreased by 58.1%.

*Developments in the usage of antibiotics that are of critical importance for public health*

In 2014, veal, cattle, pig and broiler farming sectors recorded limited use of antibiotics that are of critical importance for public health. Usage of these antibiotics continued to decline and is approaching the SDa's target level of zero. Again, the SDa has noted that these so called third-choice antibiotics were predominantly used in sectors that are not subjected to monitoring.

*The effects of benchmarking: the number of livestock farms and veterinarians included in the action, signaling and target zones*

Only a limited number of livestock farms have moved from the action zone to a lower usage level zone. In several livestock sectors, the number of livestock farms moving from the signaling zone into the target zone is also coming to a halt. The number of broiler and turkey

farms in the action zone actually increased between 2013 and 2014. The proportion of veterinarians included in the action zone varied per livestock sector, from 2.4% to 6.7%. The highest proportions were recorded for the veal and poultry farming sectors. Overall, one in three veterinarians had a prescription pattern that met the signaling level criteria.

#### The SDa board's view on the usage of antibiotics in 2014

The SDa board is pleased to see that in the monitored livestock sectors, usage of antibiotics that are of critical importance for public health has almost reached the target level of zero. Considering the importance of these antibiotics for public health, full transparency regarding the use of these products is called for. As a result, the SDa will extend its monitoring activities in 2015. It will start monitoring the rabbit farming sector and perform surveys in order to assess the usage of these antibiotics in dogs, cats and horses.

It was to be expected that the decline in the usage of antibiotics would gradually come to a halt, despite all efforts by livestock farmers and veterinarians, the introduction of benchmark thresholds and the implementation of policy changes. The SDa board has noticed that there is still substantial variation between individual farms within a livestock sector and between veterinarians. It therefore urges livestock farmers, veterinarians and all stakeholders to try even harder to further reduce the amounts of antibiotics used, particularly at farms with usage levels corresponding to the action or signaling zone.

Besides additional efforts by livestock farmers, veterinarians and stakeholders, more detailed analysis of available usage data is required, in order to identify the distinctive characteristics of low-usage livestock farms and high-usage livestock farms. This should enable the identification of success factors that might make it possible to further reduce the amounts of antibiotics used. To enable more detailed analysis regarding the usage of antibiotics, additional information on farm-specific characteristics should be collected.

The SDa board is aware that the decrease in the amounts of antibiotics used has the potential to affect animal health and animal welfare. It is therefore of the opinion that the effects on animal health and animal welfare should be assessed.

The SDa board advises the various livestock sectors and the Dutch authorities to utilize incentives in order to encourage livestock farmers and veterinarians assigned to the signaling or action zone to further reduce the amounts of antibiotics used. Rewards for livestock farmers with persistently low usage levels and their veterinarians could be just the boost they need to achieve and maintain target zone usage levels.

According to European data on the usage of antibiotics, the Dutch livestock sector has managed to achieve the greatest decline. Over the past few years, the Netherlands has moved from high-level usage of antibiotics in veterinary medicine to an average level of usage. Considering the structural differences between the livestock sectors of the various EU member states, all parties involved are delighted by this achievement. The approach used in the Netherlands has attracted the attention of several EU member states and even non-EU countries.

The SDa board has taken note of the SDa expert panel's intention to also consider the level of antibiotic resistance when determining new benchmark thresholds instead of just focusing on usage levels. The results of the resistance and usage level assessments will be presented this autumn.

Refinement of the benchmarking method and revision of the benchmark thresholds should, in addition to the proposed policy changes, result in a more sector-specific method for encouraging prudent usage of antibiotics which also takes development of antibiotic resistance into account.

Yours sincerely,

SDa, the Netherlands Veterinary Medicines Authority,



Drs. F.J.M. Werner



H.M.G. van Beers- Schreurs, DVM, PhD Chair  
Director

[Attached: SDa report Usage of Antibiotics in Agricultural Livestock in the Netherlands in 2014](#)