

Utrecht, June 6, 2016

Re: *SDa report Usage of Antibiotics in Agricultural Livestock in the Netherlands in 2015 - Trends, benchmarking of livestock farms and veterinarians, and a revision of the benchmarking method*

Dear Sir, 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 2015*. With this report, the SDa wants to provide insight into the amounts of antibiotics used in the Dutch veal, poultry, cattle and pig farming sectors in 2015. Over the 2014-2015 period, the cattle, pig and broiler farming sectors managed to reduce their usage of antibiotics in terms of defined daily doses animal by 2.2%, 5.0% and 7.4%, respectively. Antibiotic use did, however, increase in the veal farming sector (by 4.3%) and the turkey farming sector (by 16.9%). According to the sales figures for antibiotics, overall usage continued to decline in 2015, by 0.65%. Over the 2009-2015 period, sales of antibiotics for veterinary use dropped by 58.4%. Please refer to the report for a complete specification of the amounts of antibiotics used in 2015.

For each livestock sector and subsector, the SDa expert panel has analyzed the usage levels and the extent of between-farm variations, and compared the results to the usage patterns recorded for 2011. Based on its findings, the SDa expert panel can conclude that usage levels have gone down substantially, and that between-farm variations in the amounts of antibiotics used have undergone a sharp decrease as well. The SDa considers this to be a positive development, as it indicates a shift towards more prudent and uniform usage of antibiotics in the various livestock sectors.

It should be noted, however, that certain livestock farms in the action and signaling zones have not yet managed to improve their usage levels. According to the SDa, making sure that livestock farms with an action zone (red) or signaling zone (orange) usage level reduce the amounts of antibiotics used should now be the main priority. Reduction efforts should be focused on these livestock farms, as they are particularly at risk for development of antibiotic resistance and spread of resistant bacteria. However, the factors contributing to the high usage levels at these livestock farms are largely unknown. Identification of contributing factors should help distinguish between avoidable and unavoidable use of antibiotics at livestock farms in the signaling and action zones. By having livestock farms in the signaling and action zones implement improvement measures targeted specifically at these contributing factors, they will be able to achieve further reductions. This in turn will lead to more narrow and uniform usage level distributions.

In response to the lower usage levels and less pronounced between-farm variations in usage levels, the benchmarking method should be reviewed and updated accordingly. If trend analysis indicates the emergence of low and uniform usage levels within a particular livestock sector or subsector, the two benchmark thresholds may be replaced by a single and potentially final benchmark threshold representing prudent, uniform usage of antibiotics. In such cases, the sector or subsector concerned has managed to limit its antibiotic use to the minimum level achievable when keeping livestock. Improvement measures will still be required for farms repeatedly exceeding the new benchmark threshold. In sectors or subsectors with too much variation in usage levels between individual farms, the factors contributing to the farms' usage levels will have to be identified. This will provide insight into avoidable and unavoidable use of antibiotics at the farms concerned. The findings will also inform the revision of the benchmarking method that will take place in 2017 or 2018.

The SDa's objective is uniform and prudent usage of antibiotics which also takes account of animal health and animal welfare. It stresses that antibiotics should remain available for livestock in need. Although zero-level usage (no usage) of antibiotics has been observed at individual farms, the SDa expert panel is of the opinion that it should not be the ultimate goal for the Dutch livestock sector. The SDa supports the Council on Animal Affairs' call for collection and monitoring of reliable data on animal health and animal welfare within the Dutch livestock sector.

The SDa board still feels the various livestock sectors and the Dutch authorities should make better use of incentives to encourage livestock farmers and veterinarians with usage levels and prescription patterns exceeding the target zone to further reduce the amounts of antibiotics used, and reward livestock farmers and veterinarians within the target zone for their efforts.

Considering the size and constitution of the Dutch livestock population and the usage levels recorded in other European countries, the average amount of antibiotics used at Dutch livestock farms is something all parties involved can be quite proud of. The approach used in the Netherlands has attracted the attention of several EU member states and even non-EU countries. Implementation of a similar approach to veterinary usage of antibiotics by other countries will create a more level playing field for livestock farms in the Netherlands.

The Dutch livestock sector does not lend itself for a single, one-size-fits-all objective regarding antibiotic use, as a single, general objective would not be able to account for the variation in usage levels observed within particular livestock sectors and the usage level reductions already achieved by the various livestock sectors. This means a sector-specific revision of the benchmarking method is required. Together with the proposed approach and the efforts of all parties involved, this should result in prudent use of antibiotics aimed at minimizing the prevalence of antibiotic resistance.

On behalf of the SDa board,



Drs. F.J.M. Werner  
*Chair*



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