

Utrecht, June 2, 2021

Re: SDa report *Usage of Antibiotics in Agricultural Livestock in the Netherlands in 2020*

Dear Sir or Madam,

It is with great pleasure that the Netherlands Veterinary Medicines Institute (SDa) presents its report *Usage of Antibiotics in Agricultural Livestock in the Netherlands in 2020*. In this publication, the SDa reports on the amounts of antibiotics used in the Dutch turkey, veal, rabbit, poultry, cattle and pig farming sectors in 2020.

The SDa was established in late 2010 to promote responsible use of antibiotics at Dutch animal husbandries with the aim of reducing antibiotic resistance. Livestock sectors and veterinarians are committed to reducing the amounts of antibiotics used to acceptable levels. In 2020, antibiotic use in all of the monitored livestock sectors combined was lower than the year before. Despite this favorable development, there is still room for improvement. The main findings and concerns are summarized below.

Several livestock sectors recording a decline in amount of antibiotics used

In 2020, the turkey farming sector and the veal farming sector managed to reduce their amounts of antibiotics used by 38.8% and 7.3%, respectively, compared to 2019. Antibiotic use in the rabbit farming sector (i.e. meat rabbit farms) was high and has shown no improvement since 2016, the year in which monitoring efforts in this livestock sector were initiated. The SDa urges the rabbit farming sector to have prudent usage of antibiotics remain a priority and to make sure antibiotic usage data are entered into the government-specified database consistently and accurately. Antibiotic use in the other livestock sectors was stable.

As of April 1, 2021, goat farmers are also required to record antibiotic usage data in a government-specified database. Their data will be included in next year's SDa report.

Use of antibiotics classified as a drug of last resort in human medicine (fluoroquinolones and third- and fourth-generation cephalosporins) remained low in 2020. There was a rise in polymyxin use (including colistin use). Colistin was primarily prescribed for use in layers and weaner pigs. As colistin is one of the antibiotics classified as a drug of last resort in human medicine, the SDa board urges the livestock farmers and veterinarians concerned to implement the sector-specific colistin use reduction measures as soon as possible.

Slight increase in amount of antibiotics sold

In 2020, the overall amount of antibiotics sold was 2.1% higher than the year before and represented a 69.0% reduction from the government-specified reference year of 2009. Although it is normal for the amounts of antibiotics sold to deviate somewhat from the recorded amounts of antibiotics used, the extent of the discrepancy varies from year to year. The SDa wants the underlying reasons for this discrepancy to be identified, all the more so since sales data are also recorded in an EU database. A consulting agency is currently looking into these year-to-year fluctuations.

Livestock farms with persistently high usage levels and high-volume prescribers

Any additional reductions in the amounts of antibiotics used will rely heavily on addressing the persistently high usage levels observed for certain livestock farms. There are still too many livestock farms recording usage levels greatly exceeding their benchmark threshold, and too many veterinarians persistently prescribing higher volumes of antibiotics than their colleagues. With the introduction of the new benchmarking method for veterinarians, livestock sectors and veterinarians are going to address these issues collectively, guided by sector-specific action plans that have been drawn up to this end. The data on 2020 indicate that as yet not a lot of headway has been made with regard to improving the number of livestock farms with high usage levels. Even though it might simply be too soon for any noticeable effects, the SDa does stress that reducing the number of livestock farms with high usage levels should be the first priority of the parties involved.

Increase in number of livestock farms with antibiotic usage levels consistent with acceptable use

In 2018, the SDa set new benchmark thresholds for the veal, poultry and pig farming sectors. These benchmark thresholds are being regarded as distant goals by the livestock sectors concerned. Most livestock sectors have seen a slight increase in the proportion of farms recording usage levels consistent with acceptable use of antibiotics.

The turkey and rabbit farming sectors have been assigned their first *provisional* benchmark thresholds, which are to be applied as of the 2021 reporting year. The SDa had to opt for provisional benchmark thresholds as the turkey and rabbit farming sectors' usage level distributions did not yet allow for benchmark thresholds representing *acceptable use* to be derived. As of 2021, the cattle farming sector will be monitored by means of a benchmarking method that is equivalent to the method used for the other livestock sectors, and the dairy cattle farming sector has been assigned a more stringent benchmark threshold.

Although improvements have been made over the last few years, there are still too many livestock farms with persistently high usage levels. In light of this, we urge the livestock sectors to focus their reduction efforts primarily on the farms with persistently high usage levels, and address the issue adequately.

On behalf of the SDa board,

Yours sincerely,

F.J.M. Werner, MSc
Chair

H.M.G. Schreurs, DVM, PhD
Director

Attachment: [SDa report Usage of Antibiotics in Agricultural Livestock in the Netherlands in 2020](#)