

# Cattle Health and Welfare Group

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## Review identifies way forward for UK cattle industry on antibiotic data

A practical approach to gathering antibiotic usage data on UK cattle farms has been identified in a new review from the industry-led Cattle Health and Welfare Group of Great Britain (CHAWG).

The review outcomes, announced for the first time today (3 November) at a joint conference held by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), highlight the significant benefits better data could deliver, such as improving the way antibiotics are administered strategically to tackle disease.

But CHAWG's chair Tim Brigstocke says it's also important that the industry is able to accurately report usage levels because of the rising levels of antibiotic-resistant bacteria which threaten human health.

"We found that while data is already stored at every vet practice and in every farm medicine book, it currently exists in many different forms," explains Mr Brigstocke. "It's also not collected or collated, and is further complicated by multi-species approvals for many of the antibiotics.

"This means we can't always be sure in which type of animal a medicine has been used. For example, out of 420 tonnes of animal-authorized antibiotic active substance sold in the UK in 2013, only 14 tonnes was authorized solely for use in cattle. However, 63 tonnes was authorized for multi-species use in food producing animals and within the 217 products included in this, 201 are authorized for use in cattle."

Mr Brigstocke says that with the support of the VMD, which requested the review and will now act as secretariat, CHAWG will set up a working group to implement the report's recommendations.

The starting point is likely to be the survey of vets carried out by the British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA), which formed part of the review. This suggested vets could be using as many as 15 different software programmes to log data, so CHAWG will be working with the BCVA and individual practices to look at how standard sets of data can be anonymised and exported.

"Then we will almost certainly look at how cattle farmers can be supported in migrating records from the physical 'medicine book' on the farm, into a spreadsheet or existing cattle management software for anonymous aggregation on a national level.

"There are undoubtedly areas where we can improve the effectiveness of how we use these powerful medicines to improve welfare. But the antibiotic resistance debate is an emotive one and we must also demonstrate accountability to ensure the preservation of antibiotics for future use in humans and animals; any future curbs on usage should be proportionate and informed, and not compromise animal wellbeing."

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Mandatory reporting in Europe could be just over the horizon and the European Medicines Agency has focused in the past year on developing a method for data collection on the usage of antibiotics in the EU pig sector. In the UK, the VMD is encouraging the livestock sectors to develop systems appropriate to their own unique circumstances and industry characteristics.

“It’s therefore in cattle farmers’ own interests to anticipate the kind of figures it might be asked to supply in the future, and develop a way of collecting that data which suits the way the UK industry works,” says Mr Brigstocke.

“Then we can retain control over the data and the methodology, and ensure the reporting is accurate – and this in turn will help the VMD represent our case better in Europe as this debate continues.”

Throughout this project, CHAWG will be liaising with others – such as the pig sector – to ensure learnings are shared, duplication avoided and efficiencies realised where possible. “We are very keen to listen to others who have expertise in this area,” Mr Brigstocke adds.

The CHAWG review report is available to download at [www.chawg.org.uk](http://www.chawg.org.uk).

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**Notes to editors**

1. The secretariat of CHAWG is kindly funded by AHDB Dairy and AHDB Beef and Lamb.
2. The report is at <http://beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/AMR-Mapping-report-June-2015.pdf>
3. The organisations forming CHAWG are (alphabetically): Animal Health & Veterinary Laboratories Agency; Animal Health & Welfare Board for England; Animal Health Distributors Association; British Cattle Veterinary Association; Defra; Farmers Union of Wales; Holstein UK; National Beef Association; NFU (England and Wales); NFU Scotland; National Office of Animal Health; Red Tractor Assurance; RSPCA; Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers; Royal Veterinary College; Scottish Government; and Welsh Government. CHAWG would like to thank these for their efforts, as well as the many other industry bodies and private companies who supplied data.