



National Sheep Association

NSA policy position on responsible antimicrobial use in sheep

- Antimicrobial resistance is a naturally occurring phenomenon which happens as bacteria defend themselves against attack. Resistant bacteria can be found anywhere and everywhere, and any use of antibiotics in human or animal medicine can lead to the development of resistance. Rising levels of resistance are an issue of global importance for human and animal health and requires an internationally coordinated 'one health' approach.
- Scientific evidence is increasingly recognising that the main reason for antimicrobial resistance in humans is the over-use and misuse of antibiotics in human medicine, rather than animal medicine. Studies have found resistant bacteria in humans is genetically different to those in animals, suggesting animal use of antibiotics cannot be the source of human resistance.
- Of the drugs classified as antimicrobials, antibiotics are particularly essential for animal health and welfare. The sheep sector is a very low user of antibiotics but preserving their efficacy for the long-term is a priority. NSA therefore encourages responsible use of antibiotics and supports the industry-approved cross-species approach promoted by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance of using antibiotics 'as little as possible and as much as necessary'.
- The blanket use of antibiotics for disease prevention (prophylactic use) is not recommended by NSA without an annual risk assessment and close involvement with a vet. However, NSA strongly believes an animal suffering from an infection or disease, or a group of animals clearly at risk, should be promptly and appropriately treated. Adopting zero use of antibiotics in livestock would reduce the high standard of animal health and welfare within the UK. Use of antibiotics in sheep close to the point where they enter the food chain is rare and, where it happens, all drugs used in livestock have scientifically validated meat withdrawal periods to prevent medicine residues in meat. Antibiotic growth promoters have been banned across the EU since 2006.
- NSA is part of RUMA and supports its work to ensure the UK meets Government-set cross-species target in all livestock. It also supports the RUMA position that inappropriately low targets would be counterproductive and could increase the risk of resistance developing. NSA is involved in work within the sheep industry to focus on three key areas where antibiotics are often used and could be refined (in lameness control, to protect neonatal lambs and to target enzootic abortion).
- NSA is committed to sharing best practice information with its members and, through its involvement in RUMA, encouraging responsible use of all medicines. Best practice is also

vital within the veterinary profession and NSA encourages its members to regularly engage with their vet and use a Sheep Veterinary Society vet where possible.

- Antibiotic usage data collection is important, but NSA believes it needs to be at sales / vet level in order to achieve consistency and accuracy of data. Where farmers choose to collect on-farm data for management purposes, this should be handled appropriately and confidentially and only with permission.
- NSA urges extreme caution about marketing messages around antibiotic use, marketing any food product as antibiotic-free ignores the fact that antibiotics are essential within high welfare production systems. NSA does not support UK retailers or food service providers adopting this route. Some countries using 'antibiotic-free' messages are referring only to a ban on prophylactic use and NSA does not support this misleading message for UK consumers.
- NSA encourages vaccination to prevent the need for antibiotics.

September 2016
Updated January 2019 and May 2019