



Growth promoters: some Questions & Answers

Briefing Document No.16

Q: Are animals given antibiotics to boost growth?

A: No. At one time very small doses of some antibiotics were allowed to be added to feed because they improved the growth rates of some farm animals. But the EU phased out this practice, stopping the sale of antibiotic growth promoters (AGPs) on the 1st January 2006.

Q: Why was this use stopped?

A: There was a change in policy in Europe towards the use of antibiotics in this way, following concern expressed by some on the potential hazard to human health, in particular in relation to antibiotic resistance. In addition some consumers prefer to eat meat from animals that have not been medicated with growth promoters. The group in which AGPs were authorized has been removed from European legislation effectively banning the products as from the beginning of 2006.

Q: Is there scientific evidence to support the ban of AGPs

A: No, that is why the use was able to be phased out until a final stop at the end of December 2005. If there had been real health concerns, the Commission would have insisted on use stopping immediately.

Q: Are animals given hormones to boost growth?

A: No – hormonal growth promoters have been banned since 1988 in the UK and the rest of the European Union.

Some hormones are used as medicines to treat sick cattle or to aid fertility control in cattle, pigs and sheep. They must only be prescribed under the strict control of a veterinarian. These products have been licensed as safe to use in food producing animals by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, with withdrawal periods imposed to ensure no harmful residues can enter the food chain.

Q: What is the position outside the EU?

A: Legislation has always been different, in different countries. Use is permitted under regulation in some countries.

Q: Why did companies lobby in favour of continued AGP use?

A: Companies support science as a basis for decisions on whether a product should or shouldn't be placed on or remain on the market.

That said, companies do not support illegal use of antibiotics or hormones and will co-operate in every way to ensure this does not happen.

FURTHER INFORMATION

What is NOAH?

The National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) represents the UK animal medicine industry: its aim is to promote the benefits of safe, effective, quality medicines for the health and welfare of all animals. Its members supply over 90% of the UK licensed animal medicine market for pets, working and farm animals. NOAH members abide by the NOAH Code of Practice for the promotion of their products.

A full range of NOAH's briefing documents, press releases and other published documents can be found at www.noah.co.uk, which also provides links to other official and industry sites.

What is RUMA?

The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance was established in November 1997 to promote the highest standards of food safety, animal health and welfare in British livestock.

A unique initiative involving organisations representing every stage of the 'farm to fork' process, RUMA aims to promote a co-ordinated and integrated approach to best practice. (www.ruma.org.uk)

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