



Antimicrobial Use in Food Systems

Statement of the Global Leaders Group on Antimicrobial Resistance August 2021

Antimicrobial use in food systems¹ is common and has an influence on antimicrobial resistance in humans, animals, plants and the environment. Applying a One Health approach, there is a critical need to transform food systems to optimize animal, plant and environmental health, ensure responsible and sustainable antimicrobial use and most importantly, reduce the need to use antimicrobials and promote innovation for evidence-based and sustainable alternatives.

Antimicrobials are important for animal health and welfare and plant production and access to quality and affordable antimicrobials needs to be ensured. However, changes to the current situation are urgently required. While there have been significant reductions in antimicrobial use in animals globally, further improvements to reduce their use and ensure responsible and sustainable use in food systems are both of the utmost importance and attainable. Although challenging in some situations, this must be prioritized by all countries, sectors and organizations.

To promote the responsible and sustainable use of antimicrobials in food systems, the Global Leaders Group calls for the following:

1. Infection prevention and control

- **All countries** should prioritize infection prevention and control, including water, sanitation and hygiene, biosecurity and vaccination programmes as interventions to prevent and mitigate infectious disease risk and AMR across all sectors; and
- **International technical, financing and research and development organizations and partners** should support countries to improve access to and use of existing and new affordable diagnostic testing, disease prediction tools, vaccines, safe and efficacious non-antimicrobial alternatives and appropriate nutrition for infection prevention, control and treatment in terrestrial and aquatic animals, and where applicable for plants.

¹ FAO defines food systems as encompassing the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded. The food system is composed of sub-systems (e.g. farming system, waste management system, input supply system, etc.) and interacts with other key systems (e.g. energy system, trade system, health system, etc.)



2. Reducing antimicrobial use

All countries should:

- Recognize the importance of antimicrobials for animal health and welfare and plant production in their national policies and regulatory frameworks and eliminate the use of antimicrobials to compensate for inadequate infection prevention and control, management and other modifiable deficiencies in management of animal and plant health;
- Markedly reduce the overall use of antimicrobials, particularly the Highest Priority Critically Important Antimicrobials for terrestrial and aquatic animals and plants;
- End the use of medically important antimicrobials for growth promotion, starting immediately with the Highest Priority Critically Important Antimicrobials, then continuing to other categories; and
- Limit antimicrobial prophylaxis and metaphylaxis in animals and plants to well-defined situations, with a goal of markedly reducing use and ensuring that all use is performed with regulatory oversight and under the direction of an authorized prescriber.

3. Oversight and governance

All countries should:

- Ensure effective governance and professional oversight of the sales and use of antimicrobials and stewardship of antimicrobials in all sectors, including the development and implementation of evidence-based guidelines for treatment, control and prevention; and
- Eliminate or markedly reduce over-the-counter sales of antimicrobials that are important for medical or veterinary purposes and implement stringent rules to strengthen and increase professional oversight for terrestrial and aquatic animal and plant use.

International technical, financing and research and development organizations and partners should:

- Establish mechanisms to improve and broaden appropriate access to good quality antimicrobials worldwide; and
- Encourage and support the development and improvement of comparable national and international surveillance systems to enable countries to establish antimicrobial use and resistance baselines and set progressive, ambitious, science-based and nationally relevant targets for responsible and sustainable antimicrobial use across all sectors.