

# **VIEWPOINT ON ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE AND THE USE OF ANTIBIOTICS IN FOOD ANIMAL PRODUCTION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Antibiotics are important medicines for the treatment of bacterial infections in humans. They have also been widely used in food animal production since their discovery more than 50 years ago. They represent an extremely important tool in the efficient production of eggs, milk and meat. When included at sub-therapeutic levels in animal feed, antimicrobials improve growth rate and feed efficiency, reduce mortality and morbidity and improve reproductive performance. At higher levels (prophylaxis and therapeutic), antibiotics are vital for disease treatment, control and prevention. Antibiotics are also important to ensure healthy food producing animals and thus a safe food supply. The responsible use of antibiotics helps to advance public health, food safety, animal health and welfare.

However, there is a possibility that the use of antimicrobials in food producing animals may result in antimicrobial resistance, which can be transmitted to humans through the food supply chain and lead to adverse health consequences. The magnitude of the risk has not been quantified. Antimicrobial resistance means that an antimicrobial agent that was previously effective in killing or inhibiting the growth of a particular microorganism is no longer as effective and therefore the disease caused by the microorganism will be more difficult or expensive to treat. Resistant bacteria entering the human food chain, may lead to a public health risk as related antibiotics are used in human medication.

AFMA supports the responsible use of antibiotics in food animal production to ensure public health, food safety, animal health and animal welfare. AFMA believes that all antibiotics should be used according to the "Prudent Use of Antibiotics: Global Basis Principles" as elaborated by the international representative organizations of veterinarians, farmers and the animal health industry. One exception was made to these "Basic Global Principles" to comply with the South African circumstances and legislations. Therapeutic antibiotics, which are registered under Act 101 of 1965, are prescribed under the supervision of a veterinarian, while such supervision is not necessary for antibiotics registered under Act 36 of 1947 (unless it is a condition of registration e.g. for use by or under the control of a veterinarian only).

AFMA supports sound science as the basis for decision-making and policy development regarding antibiotics in food animal production. Antibiotics deemed critical in human medicine should only be used for animal life-saving measures. Beyond initial regulatory scrutiny, risk assessments should guide our use of those antibiotics considered important in human medicine.

AFMA believes that all antibiotic use decisions should be based on what serves the best interest of public health and food safety.

AFMA supports all efforts to develop and evaluate alternative growth promoters and the adjustment of management practices to ensure viable and cost-effective drug-free animal production.