Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1446 (2000)[1]

Ban on antibiotics in food production

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Antibiotics have represented extraordinary progress in the treatment of infectious diseases and have helped to save millions of human lives. They have also represented a great step forward in veterinary medicine. They have, however, gradually come to be increasingly used for prophylactic purposes, and even as animal feed additives, as "growth promoters". Evidence of their excessive use for such purposes was presented to the Seminar on the Use of Antibiotics in Food Production (London, 8 June 1998) organised by the Assembly's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

2. Misuse of antibiotics has resulted in the appearance of strains of bacteria resistant to ever larger numbers of antibiotics at such speed that pharmaceutical research and the pharmaceutical industry can no longer develop new and sufficiently strong antibiotics quickly enough. This state of affairs gives an early indication of a medical risk that diseases resistant to any treatment may soon have to be faced.

3. This situation has for several years been causing concern to the health authorities. Studies have been conducted to evaluate the development of resistance to antibiotics, and measures are gradually being taken to limit antibiotic use. European citizens are also becoming increasingly aware of these problems, and particularly of the use of antibiotics in animal feed, especially in the wake of the recent food crises in the animal production sector.

4. Antibiotics are frequently administered in the feed used in animal production to promote growth, for they help to increase the speed at which livestock develops, but in fact they are often used merely to alleviate the negative effects of poor hygiene and husbandry. The Assembly considers such misuse unacceptable.

5. The Assembly acclaims the pioneering work of the Public Health Committee (Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field) and on this subject it draws attention to the resolutions of the Committee of Ministers on the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry (AP (77) 2, AP (78) 2 and AP (84) 1), which already emphasised the risks of bacterial resistance. In the light of the importance for health of wholesome food, it regrets that only seventeen member states are participating in this Partial Agreement.

6. The Assembly calls for the use of antibiotics to be reduced or restricted whenever possible to therapeutic purposes only. It takes the same position on this as other international institutions and organisations, such as the European Parliament and European Commission, the World Health Organisation and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

7. The Assembly also welcomes the prohibition by certain member states (Finland and Sweden) of the use of antibiotics as animal feed additives, which has not led to diminished productivity at the establishments concerned. It also welcomes the fact that, on 14 December 1998, as a precautionary measure, the Council of Ministers of the European Union provisionally prohibited the use of four antibiotics as feed additives.

8. Accordingly, the Assembly calls on the European Union definitively to prohibit the use of all antibiotics in animal feed, in the light of the scientific studies already available, especially that of the Scientific Steering Committee on Resistance to Antimicrobials.

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1. Assembly debate on 27 January 2000 (7th Sitting) (see Doc. 8591, report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, rapporteur: Mrs Mikaelsson). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 January2000 (7th Sitting).

9. The Assembly calls on the governments of member states:

9.1. to prohibit the use of antibiotics as growth promoters;

9.2. to adopt the European Union's decision prohibiting certain antibiotics in animal feed;

9.3. to reduce to the minimum the use of antibiotics in animal production, so that they are used only for therapeutic reasons and only on veterinary prescription;

9.4. to set up common systems to monitor resistant micro-organisms;

9.5. to improve health monitoring in animal production establishments;

9.6. to strengthen national legislation on animal welfare so as to improve animal health, drawing particularly on the Council of Europe's European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (ETS No. 87, Strasbourg, 1976);

9.7. to co-operate on the introduction of common rules on the prudent, restrictive and supervised use of antibiotics in animal production;

9.8. to work for complete transparency of information about food safety and about the use of antibiotics in animal production;

9.9. to organise better training for stock farmers on the prevention of infection and on the prudent use of antibiotics;

9.10. to promote research with a view to developing alternatives to the use of antibiotics in animal production.

10. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

10.1. invite member states that have not yet done so:

a. to accede to the Council of Europe's Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field, so that they can take part in particular in the work and the decision-making of the Public Health Committee;

b. to sign and/or ratify the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes ;

10.2. include the use of antibiotics for humans and animals in the Council of Europe work programme on health, on the basis of data from member states about the administration and consumption of antibiotics in both human and veterinary medicine;

10.3. invite the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (T-AP) to take further its work on animal feed, particularly with regard to medicines (particularly antibiotics) used as feed additives, in co-ordination with the Public Health Committee (CD-P-SP) of the Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field, with a view to adopting common rules on the prudent use of antibiotics in food-producing animals.