

## **USE OF ANTIBIOTICS IN FARMING**

UKIP's policy on the use of antibiotics in farming is that we recognise that in the long term it is important that antibiotics are preserved for times when they are needed most. Antimicrobial resistance and the potential loss of antibiotics from use with farm animals are major causes for concern in the industry and for the sustainability of supply chains globally.

Due to the cost of antimicrobial treatment, it remains the case that usage of these medicines in farming is a last resort and something to be avoided if other practical steps are available. Antibiotic usage has to be carefully costed, if used preventatively as with other routine medicines such as vaccines and drenches. The cost of using the medicine must be less than the cost of the loss caused by not using the medicine. However, it is not simply a question of cost. In relation to their usage in farm animals, the prescription of any drug must be with veterinarian advice and is subject to strict control under farm assurance schemes. These assurance schemes ensure the safety of animal products treated with medicines and provide for a level of welfare equal to or above national requirements. UKIP is aware that there are schemes that require continuous improvement in animal health measures and promote welfare measures (health, hygiene, environment and feed) before medicine, such as the Red Tractor scheme. UKIP supports these above those that produce meat just to a price. However, we will not dictate to farmers how they are to manage their businesses. If there is consumer support for one method of production over another, an assurance scheme will be available to meet that market demand.

We note with interest that methods for diagnosing illnesses in farm animals are improving all the time (see for example article in Farmers Weekly 9 May:

<http://www.fwi.co.uk/livestock/on-farm-mastitis-test-could-help-cut-antibiotics-use-in-dairy-cows.htm>

Improvements in our understanding of the relationship between animal health and welfare is desirable and innovation in this regard is to be welcomed. Rapid and low-cost diagnosis will improve the efficacy of treatment, help avoid the need for preventative treatment and will contribute to the overall aim of preserving antibiotic usage for times when they are needed most. However, we also note that it is not simply a question of using what we have less, as, over time, resistance and new bacteria will evolve anyway. There are important issues around investment in new antimicrobials and the regulatory burden and rewards for doing so. UKIP will ensure

that research and development focusses on reducing and avoiding antibiotic usage in farm animals where at all possible, but also in creating a regulatory environment that stimulates and rewards scientific innovation.

Responsible usage of antimicrobials is crucial and the industry supply chain can go a long way to develop and refine concepts of responsible usage. We recognise that the farmer in partnership with a veterinarian has control over every aspect of the animals' lives and so has much greater ability to influence health and welfare and consequently reduce the use of medicines, compared to a doctor who can simply treat the patient at the point of illness and has no other control over reducing usage of antimicrobials. Despite this, the usage of antimicrobials in farm animals is just one aspect of a global problem and the burden of responsible usage and innovation must not be faced by agriculture alone.