



Red Tractor Assurance

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Protecting HP-CIAs “so important for animal and human health” says leading vet

A leading vet has issued a stark reminder over the need for highest priority critically important antibiotics (HP-CIAs) to only be administered to farm animals when all other treatment options have been exhausted.

Phil Elkins, the chair of Westpoint Farm Vets’ Clinical Governance Board and the BCVA’s appointee on the Red Tractor Assurance Dairy Board and Technical Advisory Committee, says HP-CIAs must only be prescribed as a last resort or face being withdrawn from use altogether.

It is a requirement of the Red Tractor Dairy and Beef and Lamb standards that HP-CIAs are used as a last resort under veterinary direction, backed up by either sensitivity or diagnostic testing.

The scheme standard reflects BCVA advice issued two years ago which recommended minimal use of the third and fourth generation cephalosporins, fluoroquinolones and colistin.

It said the drugs should only be used where they have been demonstrated by sensitivity testing to be the only suitable choice to avoid unnecessary suffering.

Mr Elkins said: “Experience across a wide spectrum of farm animal vets shows that it is rarely the case that HP-CIAs are the only ones which will work. In fact, in a recently published study, one practice has shown that eliminating these products entirely has had no effect on welfare outcomes for cows.

“The justification to use these products must be strong. If, as an industry, we do not effectively eliminate their use other than in extreme situations, the option to use them will get taken away from us and then when we do need them, they will not be available.”

There are two commercially available routes to help vets; disc diffusion and determination of minimal inhibitory concentrations.

“Both have their potential flaws,” Mr Elkins said, adding genetic markers for resistance are being identified and may provide a better alternative in the future.

“But until then, the currently available tools are the best we have.”

HP-CIAs are designated by the European Medicines Agency because they are some of the only available therapies for some of the most serious bacterial infections in human health.

Last week RUMA, the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance, published its One Year On report detailing the reduction in antibiotic use by species.

It concluded that farmers and the veterinary profession are “committed and making good progress” but also that the sectors are all in very different places.

Red Tractor has produced a free template for vets to use in collaboration with dairy farmers. It can be found [here](#).

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