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Stricter Control On Antibiotics In Animal Husbandry

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Report Highlights:

The German Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV) announced a package of measures to have a better control on the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry. The way data is collected and processed will be changed to make the use of antibiotics more transparent and to develop ways to fight resistance. Data about the use of antibiotics in poultry production will now also be collected.

The following is our unofficial translation of a press release by the German Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV) on November the 9th.

Package of measures by the German Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (BMELV) on the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry.

Making the use of antibiotics more transparent, minimizing their use consistently and fighting resistance.

The use of antibiotics will be better monitored and the use of data will be newly regulated by a targeted package of measures by the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection. As a part of the German antibiotic resistance strategy (under the German abbreviation 'DART') the goal is to achieve a reduction of the antibiotic levels nationwide and to improve the supervision by the competent state authorities.

Antibiotics are the main tool for the treatment of infectious diseases. But cases of resistance to antibiotics are also increasing in Germany. Because of this, medication can lose its effectiveness for sick people or infected animals. Since each use of antibiotics may promote resistance, it must be ensured that antibiotics are only used in animals for food production, and only if it is strictly necessary. There are clear rules for the use of antibiotics: According to the German Medicines Act antibiotics may only be used for the treatment of sick animals, not to promote growth. Antibiotics also may not be used for diseases that are caused by rearing conditions. Violations of these regulations are punishable. Monitoring of regulation compliance is the responsibility of state authorities. The different states (Laender) in Germany are responsible for veterinary and livestock control.

In order that the relevant state authorities can fulfill their control and monitoring tasks more effectively, faster and less bureaucratically, in order for veterinarians use antibiotics in a more economical, conscious and responsible governance and in order for the quality of data on the pharmaceutical use in Germany to be radically improved, the Ministry plans a package of measures:

- Both the German Medicine Act known as AMG, and also pharmaceutical regulations shall be changed. Information about the prescribed quantities for veterinarians and the actual consumption of antibiotics should be processed in a way that the states can better use this information for monitoring purposes. In the future, the data on the pharmaceuticals use for poultry will also be fully available. Evidence of the mandatory

use of pharmaceuticals for animals will be utilized better by the competent national authorities for monitoring purposes. All veterinarians are required to provide documentation to the competent authority: The supervisory authorities of the states will be able to detect the flow of pharmaceuticals in specific from veterinarians to livestock producers to the single animal.

- The regulation on veterinary pharmacies will be expanded and reinforced: The vets will have to orient even more on the antibiotic guidelines of the Federal Chamber of Veterinarians as well as the guidelines for the oral medication. This recognizes the fact that antibiotics as the most important tool to cure animals can become ineffective by the excessive use of it.
- In Mid-2012 accurate data will be published for the first time about the released quantities of pharmaceuticals for animals in Germany. The data will show in which zip code areas the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry is particularly intense. In addition, by using the new numbers and in conjunction with the regularly collected data about resistance in zoonotic and commensal bacteria it can be analyzed, what correlations exists between the quantitative use of antibiotics and the recognizable references to the development of antibiotic resistance.
- The BMELV has founded a new working group called "Antibiotic resistance". Its mission is to analyze all results like the resistance monitoring or the data about the released quantities, to do risk assessment of the antibiotic resistance development and to develop strategies for the risk management.

On the one hand, data collection is significant for inventory, for risk assessment and for the further development of mitigation strategies for the use of antibiotics. On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify that the competent supervisory authorities of the states have all needed tools to investigate and stop any suspected improper and irregular use of veterinary medicines. Veterinary pharmacies and farms can be visited and controlled by supervisory officials. For violations the authorities have sufficient sanctions available. The BMELV encourages states to make full use of the available monitoring, controlling and sanctioning procedures. (End of translation)

Comment: The use of antibiotics for growth promotion is forbidden in Germany. Minister Aigner seeks stricter control of the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry by changing the way data is collected. Her main goals are to reduce the use of antibiotics and to fight the spread of antibiotic resistance. Another goal is that data for poultry shall also be collected for the first time. According to press reports Minister Aigner proactively proposes these measures preempting the results of a study that is currently carried out by the state ministry of agriculture in North-Rhine Westphalia The study focuses on the use of antibiotics on chicken farms and is

to be published by the end of November. If the measures are implemented, they will have just an internal effect for Germany. But the use of antibiotics could become a topic again and Germany may, in the long run, seek to influence the legislation at the EU level. End Comment.