

MARTIN HÄUSLING (MEP).

Agricultural spokesman for the Greens/EFA Group

Member of the Committee on Agriculture and the Environment in the European Parliament



Summary of the study

'Research on reserve antibiotics in food-producing animals'

Reserve antibiotics as metaphylaxis and group treatment dispensable'

On behalf of Martin Häusling, MEP

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This report deals with the question which political measures in the field of veterinary medicine are suitable for regulating the use of particularly important antibiotics with the highest priority for human medicine (according to the WHO list "Highest priority critically important antimicrobials for human use", in short HP CIA or colloquially "reserve antibiotics").

- **There is an urgent need for political action in the EU because the sale of reserve antibiotics in food-producing animals is increasing in many EU countries, thereby provoking an increase in resistance rates in food chains as well.**
- **No therapy emergency in stables if reserve antibiotics are banned as metaphylaxis.**
Germs that play a pathogenic role in food-producing animals can generally be controlled with antibiotics other than reserve antibiotics, with vaccinations and other measures to improve animal health. Proof of this are, among others, the countries with intensive animal husbandry and relevant meat and milk production, which manage without or with the smallest amounts of reserve antibiotics without impairing animal health. This argues for a differentiation: ban of reserve antibiotics as metaphylaxis or group treatment, exceptions must be reported to the authorities.

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- Reserve antibiotics are predominantly sold for group treatment in food-producing animals (fluoroquinolones 78%, colistin 99%, macrolides 91%) as a premix in feed, as a powder or solution for mixing into the drinking water (ESVAC 2020). Group treatment entails numerous risks for the formation of resistant pathogens in pipes, pipe systems and through under- or overdosing, which are not present in individual animal therapy.
- Within the EU, political regulation of antibiotic use in food-producing animals is mainly based on the recording of antibiotic consumption in tonnes per year. These recording measures have successfully contributed to a reduction in antibiotic consumption in tons since 2011. Looking at the most important antibiotic active substances for humans, the picture is different: the number of EU countries with increasing or stagnating consumption of reserve antibiotics in food-producing animals in 2016 to 2018 exceeds the number of EU countries with decreasing consumption of HP CIA in this period (ESVAC 2020). Therefore, without effective EU regulation, there is a risk that antibiotic resistance to reserve antibiotics will become increasingly widespread both in farm animals and in the food chain and in humans.
- A part of the reduction in the tonnage of antibiotics used in meat and dairy production in the EU since 2011 is due to a **switch of substances**: antibiotics from the reserve antibiotic series are increasingly being used (Wallmann 2018). These more potent antibiotics weigh less in some cases for the same number of animals treated. High antibiotic resistance rates to reserve antibiotics on meat species such as poultry (BVL 2020, Germanwatch 2019, 2020) underline the need for action.
- According to the authors, the reduction in the tonnage of antibiotics in food-producing animals cannot be attributed to EU-wide improvements in stables or to changes in animal husbandry rules, as no new binding EU rules or enforcement measures to improve animal welfare have been enacted for years.

Against this background, the authors recommend a ban on the use of reserve antibiotics according to the WHO list as group treatment or metaphylaxis. The treatment of individual animals should be regulated as an exception with legal certainty.

- **Advancing legal animal protection as a lever for reducing the need for reserve antibiotics**

From the authors' point of view, it is time to open up new reduction potentials by improving animal welfare in stables. Decisive factors for animal welfare in favour of stable animal health include

- More animal-friendly husbandry methods with access to the outdoors
- Turning away from high-performance breeding or new breeding goals with a view to robust animals
- Changing to longer suckling periods for piglets, to more species-appropriate raw fibre-rich feeding of all other animals in favour of an immune-boosting intestinal flora

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- **Improve stability of animal health and therapeutic options through easy access to alternative remedies**

EU legislation to date has led to stagnation in the authorisation of herbal preparations for animals. We demand a simplified authorisation for herbal medicinal products (analogous to homeopathics) and the preservation of herbal active ingredients as nutraceuticals in animal nutrition. These active ingredients do not cause bacteria to develop resistance, they produce little to no residues in food and are completely degradable in soil and water. Plant-based preparations are demonstrably suitable for the preventive reduction of bacterial diseases and thus support efforts to reduce the use of antibiotics.