ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL FEEDINGSTUFFS

Fifteenth Meeting of ACAF on 4 July 2002 – Agenda Item 5

PROPOSED EC REGULATION ON FEED ADDITIVES – ANTIBIOTIC GROWTH PROMOTERS

Action: The Committee is asked to give its views on the EC proposal to phase out the use of the remaining four antibiotic growth promoters permitted in the EU.

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PROPOSED EC REGULATION ON FEED ADDITIVES – ANTIBIOTIC GROWTH PROMOTERS

Purpose

1. At its fourteenth meeting the Committee discussed the proposed EC Regulation on Feed Additives (see paper ACAF/02/12). Members requested a further paper focussing on the proposal to phase out the use of antibiotic growth promoters (AGPs) and for more information on the Swedish experience of banning these products. This paper outlines the background to the EC proposal to phase out the use of AGPs by 2006, including the opinion of the European Commission’s Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) on AGPs and advice on their use from the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC). The paper also encloses an extract from the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food’s (ACMSF) report on Microbial Antibiotic Resistance in Relation to Food Safety (Annex I). The extract reports on the Swedish experience of banning AGPs. An extract from a World Health Organisation report on the Medical Impact of Antimicrobial Use in food Animals, also reporting on the Swedish experience, is at Annex II.

Background

2. Antibiotics for use in animals are authorised either as veterinary medicinal products or as zootechnical feed additives (the latter include AGPs). AGPs work by increasing the efficiency of the absorption of feed in the animal gut, thereby allowing it to reach its slaughter size more quickly than if not fed these substances.

3. The use of zootechnical feed additives in the EU is subject to controls set out in Directive 70/524/EC, as amended. No feed additive may be authorised unless it satisfies criteria set out in the Directive, including a requirement that at the level permitted in feedingstuffs it does not adversely affect human or animal health or the environment. Furthermore, such additives may only be used within the terms set out in the annexes to the Directive.

4. At their meeting in December 1998, EU Agriculture Ministers voted to ban the use of four growth promoting antibiotics namely bacitracin zinc, spiramycin, tylosin phosphate and virginiamycin. The ban came into effect in July 1999. The ban was introduced on the grounds that the antibiotics in question were used, or were similar to antibiotics used, in human or animal medicine, and there was concern that the development of resistance to the growth promoters might jeopardise their efficacy in medical or veterinary use. This ban left four antibiotic growth promoters – avilamycin,
flavophospholipol, monensin sodium and salinomycin sodium - still available for use.

VPC Advice

5. In considering the use of antibiotics, the VPC has consistently followed the principles established in the Report of the Joint Committee on Use of Antibiotics in Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Medicines (Swann Report of 1969). Whilst it considers that the prophylactic use of antibiotics on advice of a veterinary surgeon should not be ruled out, it does not recommend the authorisation of antibiotics for prophylactic use (use for disease prevention rather than treatment). Its latest recommendations on the use of antibiotics were presented to Ministers in December 1998. These recommendations included the collection of data on antimicrobial usage, more research into antimicrobial usage, more research into antimicrobial resistance and the development of Codes of Practice for the Use of Antimicrobials in Farm Animals.

Action by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and others

6. Information papers on the use of antimicrobials in farm animals covering the period from 1993 – 2000 have been published by the VMD. These papers are available on the VMD website at www.vmd.gov.uk. A survey of use on farms, involving questionnaires and interviews with veterinary surgeons and farmers, has taken place to gather further information on how antibiotics are used. The final report is currently being reviewed. Other initiatives are taking place at the VMD, including finding ways of refining the collection of data and analysis. The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA), an alliance of non-government organisations, has produced a series of guidelines on the responsible use of antimicrobials.

Commission proposal to phase out antibiotic growth promoters

7. A Commission Proposal has been presented for a new EC Feed Additives Regulation. This will replace the current Directive 70/524/EC. One of the main implications of this proposed Regulation is the phasing out of the four remaining antibiotic growth promoters. In its opinion adopted on 28 May 1999, the SSC recommended that the use of antimicrobials as growth promoting agents, belonging to classes that are or may be used in human or veterinary medicine, should be phased out as soon as possible and ultimately abolished. A second opinion of the SSC on anti-microbial resistance adopted on 10-11 May 2001 confirmed the need to plan for the phase-out process and to make efforts to replace those antimicrobials by alternative products.
8. The following provisions have been included in the draft Regulation in order to comply with the SSC recommendation:

- exclusion of the antibiotics from the scope of the new legislation on feed additives, i.e. the request for authorisation of antibiotic feed additives will no longer be permitted; and

- adoption of a transitional period for the phasing out of the four remaining antibiotics to allow animal production practices to be adapted. These substances will be prohibited from 1 January 2006.

9. The phase-out period is intended to give industry the opportunity to seek alternative products and husbandry methods, and to consider animal health and welfare.

Welfare implications

10. Part of the improved performance achieved with antibiotic growth promoters results from their suppression of sub-clinical disease. The deletion of AGPs will increase disease incidence thus raising animal welfare concerns. In the short term, more therapeutic antibiotics are likely to be used. However, the Soil Association believes that phasing out of AGPs will lead to more extensive systems of livestock production and therefore better animal welfare.

The Swedish example

11. Chapter 10 of the ACMSF’s Microbial Antibiotic Resistance in Relation to Food Safety Report (attached to this paper) includes a useful analysis of the consequences of the ban of antibiotic growth promoters in Sweden in 1986.

Possible alternatives to antibiotic growth promoters

12. There are already alternatives to AGPs in the form of probiotics, enzymes and micro-organisms, and non-antibiotic growth promoters such as potassium diformate, although efficacy data do not compare favourably with the rates of live weight gain and feed conversion ratios obtained with AGP’s.
Action

13. Members are invited to discuss the issues raised in this paper and the ACMSF’s report. In particular, the Committee is asked to give its views on the EC proposal to phase out the use of the remaining four AGPs permitted in the EU.

ACAF Secretariat
Food Standards Agency
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