

Policy Brief

Achieving further reductions in antimicrobial use for livestock production within the EU

Authors Laura Palczynski¹; Mukhtar Muhammad¹; Helena Ferreira²; Erwin Wauters²; Marc Bracke³; Sandija Rivza⁴; Martine Dellevoet-Groenewegen⁵; Lisa Morgans¹

¹ IfA, UK; ² ILVO, Belgium; ³ WUR, Netherlands; ⁴ LLU, Latvia; ⁵ ZLTO, Netherlands



Background

Encouraging progress has been made towards reducing antimicrobial resistance (AMR) over the last few years. The substantial decline in veterinary antimicrobial sales in some countries indicate that there is scope for further reductions in others (ESVAC, 2021), but the ‘easy wins’ with regards to veterinary antimicrobial use may be dwindling. To achieve further reductions in antimicrobial use in livestock farming, a range of approaches are needed to support change.

The DISARM project formed a collaborative network of researchers, industry, advisors and farmers focused on reducing the need for antibiotics in livestock farming by focusing on disease prevention and prudent use of antibiotics. One key element of DISARM was the Farm Health Team approach in which a facilitator supported the farm team (comprised of farm staff and advisors e.g. veterinarians, nutritionists) to establish a farm-specific action plan towards improved animal health and lower antimicrobial usage.

Policy Implications

This policy paper aims to provide recommendations with a view to promote discourses around safeguarding antimicrobials for public and animal health. It focuses on three main areas:

- Supporting change at farm level
- Expansion of the Farm Health Team approach
- Achieving the One Health Approach in practice

The new CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) aims to be “greener and fairer” and continue to embrace innovation. Farmers need assistance to navigate regulatory requirements and copious information on a multitude of topics to better equip them to maintain viable, sustainable businesses. Access to information alone will not necessarily lead to change. Facilitated farmer-led, multi-actor initiatives help to empower farmers to take the most appropriate actions on their farms and should be better implemented within the whole European AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System) as part of a One Health Approach.

Take home messages

A more integrated and coordinated approach is needed to help to achieve more sustainable, resilient, socially conscious and profitable farming:

- **Support facilitated multi-actor knowledge exchange** opportunities which create an interdisciplinary and enabling environment to help farmers to make the best decisions for their farms, livestock, environment and wider society.
- **Facilitated Farm Health Teams are a key mechanism** which empower farmers to act based on input from several advisors with different expertise.
- **Standard Farm Health Team methodology should be established at EU Level** and Member States encouraged to adopt it in their national regulations.





Supporting change at farm level

Farmer-led initiatives and support mechanisms should be integral components of national AKIS and CAP to help farmers to navigate challenges and seize opportunities

Findings from the Project

Recommendation

- | Findings from the Project | Recommendation |
|---|---|
| 1. Farmers must navigate their businesses within a complex, multifaceted and fluctuating system. Facilitated multi-actor exchange empowers farmers to prioritise the most pressing challenges and viable opportunities on their farm. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The new CAP should invest in a wider systems approach to better support farmers in dealing with the range of legal, regulatory and economical requirements they must consider.• This should include interdisciplinary scientific input to establish effective social, market, mandatory and voluntary measures that help farmers to make the best decisions for their farms and wider society. |
| 2. Different farmers will have different preferences for knowledge exchange which may change over time according to their circumstances and experiences. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fund longitudinal research to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of different knowledge exchange processes. |
| 3. Competing commercial interests and expenses related to professionals' time (coaches, advisors) presented challenges to the multi-actor approaches used in DISARM. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make funding available to kick start collaborative mechanisms and pay for the time and expertise of different actors.• This could be through grants or competitions to cover costs for a set time period, after which the group can opt to fund its continuation themselves. |
| 4. Farmers expressed concerns about the way in which relevant policies were communicated. Poor awareness of available subsidies, eligibility, application procedure and/or not having enough time to apply were mentioned. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further improve legal and policy communications to farmers and their advisors so that information is clear, understandable and provided in a timely fashion. |
| 5. Multiple stakeholders expressed interest in a greater number of better diagnostic and treatment options to further reduce reliance on antimicrobials in veterinary medicine. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage the co-development of effective options/tools for animal health management.• Fund evaluations of the cost-effectiveness of animal health interventions and communicate this to farmers, free from commercial bias. |
- 



Expansion of the Farm Health Team Approach

The Farm Health Team approach would be an effective AKIS tool to support farm-level activities aligned with the key objectives of the new CAP

Findings from the Project

1. The case studies conducted across 9 EU countries highlighted key differences in advisory structures available to farmers, as shown in this [report](#). Whereas some countries had already incorporated farm teams as part of their national regulations (e.g. [The Danish Yellow Card System](#)), others apparently had no clear mechanism or delivery arm through which to institutionalize the approach.
2. Coaching/facilitating requires a skillset which differs from that of traditional consultancy. The focus is not on providing expert advice, but on **asking questions to create an enabling environment** to help farmers and farm staff, together with their advisors, to put knowledge into practice.
3. In line with behaviour change theories such as [ADKAR®](#), reinforcement and sustained support is critical to facilitate continuous improvement. This takes considerable time and effort to maintain relationships and follow-up on progress, so a sufficient workforce is essential.

The case studies also highlighted that it could be difficult to establish and maintain MAFHTs due to concerns about paying for the advisors' time.

Recommendation

- Fund **country-specific analyses** of how the Farm Health Team approach could be **better integrated** into Member States' AKIS strategies and applied to topic areas beyond animal health (e.g., to encourage climate-friendly farming, environmental stewardship, etc.).
 - Promote the approach to become an integrated part of national CAP and AKIS strategies.
 - Develop a **standard methodology** and guidelines for the Farm Health Team approach at the EU-level.
 - Encourage national funding for the **training and accreditation** of agricultural coaches and facilitators to ensure the effectiveness and reputation of the approach.
 - Support the development of **business and delivery models** to make the approach viable and sustainable in various Member States.
 - This could include subsidising the costs for coaches/facilitators and requiring farmers and their advisors to participate in the Farm Health Team Approach as part of national regulations.
- 



Achieving the One Health Approach in practice

Facilitating international and cross-sector fertilisation alongside monitoring, traceability and transparency

Findings from the Project

1. DISARM connected with Operational Groups focused and is one of five EU-funded projects in the ArMoR partnership formed through participation in the Horizon Results Booster Service. However, it remains unclear how these efforts will be maintained and effectively link with wider and ongoing initiatives.
2. Different Member States use different regulatory mechanisms with regards to antimicrobial stewardship, suggesting that there is scope for different countries to learn from each other.
3. Language barriers and translation costs hinder international collaborations.
4. DISARM's [research prioritisation reports](#) indicated that survey respondents perceived a tendency for AMR to be attributed (unfairly) to certain sectors, exacerbated by lack of cross-sectoral, international monitoring of antimicrobial use and emergence of AMR. This contributed to a tendency to shift blame rather than focus on joint solutions.

Recommendation

- Develop clear mechanisms through which EU-funded projects and other initiatives can connect with and contribute to overarching One Health efforts.
- This should contribute to the **integrated and coordinated approach** that the Quadripartite Collaboration for One Health use to tackle the challenges at the human, animal, plant and ecosystem interface.
- Facilitate **cross-border learning initiatives** for policymakers, researchers and industry actors to exchange ideas for policy and market mechanisms to support antimicrobial stewardship in practice.
- Support the **translation of information** resources into a range of EU languages in the interests of inclusivity and accessibility.
- Translations could be offered as part of the Horizon Results Booster service to enable the results of EU-funded projects to achieve further reach.
- Collaborate with the Quadripartite Collaboration for One Health to **develop transparent monitoring** and traceability of antimicrobial use and AMR – without naming and shaming – in a way which is compatible across different sectors/countries.
- Support global and cross-sectoral collaboration to become more visible to drive positive narratives.

More information

- DISARM resources: [Farm Health Team toolbox](#) for guidance on the approach and [case studies](#) on its application.
 - [ADKAR® Methodology](#): Awareness of the need to change, Desire to participate in change, Knowledge on how to change, Ability to implement change and Reinforcement to sustain change
 - The Quadripartite Collaboration for One Health [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO)
- 