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Antibiotic Awareness Day: EU must cut use in farms

- **At least [25,000](#) Europeans die from antibiotic resistance every year. Misuse and overuse in farm animals fuels such resistance.**
- **Member States must urgently adopt strong EU measures to cut antibiotic use in farms. Without action, medicine could go back to pre-antibiotic era.**
- **Europe celebrates Antibiotic Awareness Day on 18 November.**

To stop microbes developing resistance to antibiotics, the EU must urgently adopt legislation to slash the use of antibiotics in farm animals. This is what the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) is calling for in its [campaign¹](#) to raise consumer awareness about the risks of antibiotic resistance on [European Antibiotic Awareness Day](#) (18 November).

In 2014, the Commission put forward plans to update EU legislation on veterinary medicines, including measures to curb the use of antibiotics on farms. [The EU Parliament strengthened them last year](#) and BEUC is now urging Member States to urgently reach a common position so they can agree with the EU Parliament and update current rules.

Action to reduce veterinary antibiotic use has been uneven across EU countries, [as BEUC's 'Superbug Tour' campaign showed](#). The [latest data](#) from the European Medicine Agency found Cyprus, Spain and Italy top the list of countries with the highest sales of antibiotics destined for use in farms. In contrast, countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania and Norway have much lower sales.

Change is possible. Countries which took measures to lower the use of antibiotics in farm animals achieved remarkable results in only a few years. The Netherlands² and France³ are some of the examples.

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, commented:

"Under current rules, healthy chickens, pigs or cows can receive antibiotics on a purely preventive basis. But the more antibiotics are used, the higher the risk bacteria become resistant. If these harmful practices go on, antibiotic resistance will soon reach the point of no return and benign injuries could become deadly again.

¹ 13 consumer organisations from the BEUC network have participated in this campaign: Asociația Pro Consumatori (Romania), CLCV (France), Consumentenbond (Netherlands), EKPIZO and KEPKA (Greece), Forbrugerrådet Tænk (Denmark), Kypriakos Sundesmos Katanaloton (Cyprus), Lietuvos vartotojų organizacijų aljansas (Lithuania), OCU (Spain), Spoločnosti ochrany spotrebiteľov (Slovakia), Test Achats/Test Aankoop (Belgium), Verein für Konsumenteninformation (Austria), Zveza Potrošnikov Slovenije (Slovenia).

² Farm antibiotic sales decreased by 58.4% from 2009 to 2015. See [report](#) to gather information on the prudent use of antimicrobials in animals in the Netherlands.

³ Use of farm antibiotics decreased by 20% between 2011 and 2015. See [report](#) to gather information on the prudent use of antimicrobials in animals in France.

“The fight against resistance is only as strong as the weakest link. Superbugs cross borders. So one country’s exemplary measures may have their impact watered down if neighbouring Member States do not act. That’s why EU-wide rules are urgently needed to tackle the improper use of veterinary antibiotics.

“The EU has an ambitious law waiting to be approved. Member States must swiftly sign off those strong measures without further delay.”

Background:

Every year, in the European Union, an estimated 25,000 patients die because of infections caused by resistant bacteria – also called ‘superbugs’ – which can no longer be killed by antibiotics. While humans should go easy on antibiotics, farm animals should too. Misuse and overuse of antibiotics in livestock fuels resistance.

[Like us](#), the EU Parliament advocated in 2016 to:

- Ban the routine preventive use of antibiotics in animals
- Reserve for human use those antibiotics which are vitally important to treat people
- Prohibit the online sales of antibiotics
- Reduce the need for antibiotics by improving farming practices including hygiene and animal care.

ENDS

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