

## **Our commitment to preserving treatment of life-threatening disease**

By Mark Ross

Antibiotics are vital for treating people and animals because there are no alternatives to treating life-threatening bacterial infections. The world has recognised that antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a challenge that costs lives.

Our vision is a world where veterinary antibiotics are used responsibly to protect and treat animals, and where they maintain their value as a therapeutic tool. An equally important challenge is maintaining and increasing food safety and security.

To address these interconnected challenges, animal health organisations from around the world commit to five principles and practical actions, and proactively encourage others to embrace them as well.

The HealthforAnimals Global Animal Health Sector Commitment and Actions on Antibiotic Use shows how the whole animal medicines sector is working collectively on a global level, echoing and complementing our activities in New Zealand. Agcarm and over 200 companies and associations, and 700,000 veterinarians worldwide support the commitment.

Taken together, these measures preserve the health and welfare of our farm animals and ensure the responsible use of antibiotics.

The first principle takes a unified approach to protecting animal health and welfare. This means that animal health products are of the same high quality as those for people. In addressing antimicrobial resistance, the health of people and animals and environmental impacts are considered equally. To achieve this, partnerships between animal health companies, farmers, veterinarians, retailers, authorities and associations must be strengthened. Integral to this is developing new solutions and ideas, and exploring joint actions.

Before the use of antibiotics, animals need appropriate shelter, hygienic conditions, good food and regular monitoring of their health and welfare, as well as addressing biosecurity issues. This also involves diagnostics, vaccination, and using and maintaining a pharmacovigilance system when necessary. In essence, the second principle involves using antibiotics judiciously and responsibly and only when needed.

Disease prevention and increasing access to products and expertise is the basis for the third principle. This means promoting methods and techniques that prevent disease. In addition, it means seeking maximum access and affordability of legitimate products to counter the use of illegal, low quality and fake products in some markets, and contributing to education and training on the dangers of their use.

Investing in developing products for preventing and treating disease to reduce reliance on antibiotics forms the fourth principle.

Affiliated animal health companies commit to investing between six to nine percent of their annual turnover to develop new products, diagnostics, genetics and life-cycle management of existing products. Global annual animal health sector revenues are estimated at US\$30 billion. If all animal health companies invested a similar percentage, this would equate to an annual investment of US\$1.8 - 2.7 billion for prevention and treatment options for food and companion animals. Investment at these levels for new solutions is commercially viable only if rising cost factors like regulatory cost are reduced.

Governments facilitate this by increasing incentives for new technological advances, facilitating regulatory pathways for all types of products, encouraging increased uptake of vaccination, and supporting availability and access to veterinarians.

The fifth principle involves increasing knowledge, transparency and communication. Many animal health companies undertake scientific research into AMR pathways. Our members are committed to contributing to the collection of national and international antibiotic use data. We encourage producers and retailers to be transparent about animal health and welfare impacts resulting from antibiotic-free production practices. Agcarm is committed to communicating about responsible use, vaccination and other prevention methods, while continuing to provide data and advice to our customers on managing diseases.

For the past two decades, Agcarm and its membership have been proactively leading the charge against the challenge of antibiotic resistance development on a number of different levels. This includes actions such as: providing input into policy; promoting responsible veterinary and animal health practices; and awareness-raising.

It is encouraging that our work is having a meaningful impact, which will help veterinary antibiotics to remain effective and available for use in the future. We will continue to promote and support responsible use in the coming years, and ensure that animal health and welfare is maintained.

- Mark Ross is chief executive of Agcarm, the industry association for companies which manufacture and distribute crop protection and animal health products.

**Notes:** HealthforAnimals released its global '[Commitments and Actions on Antibiotic Use](#)' Statement (often called the 'Antibiotics Commitment') last year.