

## Dairy UK Position Paper

### Antibiotics in Milk

March 2016

---

#### Contents

Background .....	1
Dairy UK Position – for industry and stakeholders .....	1
Media statement.....	3
Media statement re O’Neill report on AMR .....	3

#### Background

1. An antibiotic is a drug which kills or slows the growth of bacteria. Antibiotics have no effect against viruses, fungi, or parasites. Antibiotics are one class of antimicrobials, a larger group which also includes anti-viral, anti-fungal, and anti-parasitic drugs. They are relatively harmless to the host, and therefore can be used to treat infections.
2. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate’s (VMD) is the organisation responsible for monitoring foods in order to ensure that the consumer is protected against potentially harmful residues of veterinary medicines in foods.
3. The VMD operates two surveillance programmes, a statutory programme which implements EU legislation and a non-statutory programme, which supplements and expands this programme to include imported products. The costs of the statutory programme are met by charges levied on industry, while the non-statutory programme is funded by DEFRA.
4. The last statutory surveillance programme took place in 2013. During that time, 1646 tests were carried out on milk for the detection of antibiotic residues and only 3 samples (0.2%) were found to contain levels above legal limits.
5. Strict rules and regulations also ensure that food businesses operating within the dairy supply chain have measures in place to satisfy themselves that the milk they produce or process is compliant with legally permitted levels.

#### Dairy UK Position – for industry and stakeholders

6. In order to control antibiotic residues in milk, the British dairy industry has put in place one of the most stringent testing systems within Europe which goes beyond legal requirements.

#### *Practice in the UK: farm level*

7. There are many approaches to the control of antibiotic residues in milk. The primary control is on farm and begins with the correct prescription and administration of the antibiotics and the careful

adherence to withdrawal periods. In short, milk producers must ensure that milk from animals under treatment or in the withdrawal period does not enter the food chain.

8. Antibiotics are only administered to cows for therapeutic reasons including the treatment of illness and for dry cow therapy. They are administered 'on-label' (which means the dose administration and withdrawal period instructions appearing on the label are followed), or 'off-label' (i.e. as directed by a veterinarian).
9. Milk of animals treated with 'on-label' antibiotics does not require testing at the end of treatment, although some producers will do so for precautionary or commercial reasons. If the milk fails, it should be reported to the VMD.
10. For antibiotics used 'off-label' a mandatory withdrawal period of 7 days is in place, at the end of which milk should be tested. The 7 day withdrawal period is only a statutory minimum; some veterinarian's will impose longer withdrawal periods.
11. In the EU, it is illegal to routinely give antibiotics to cattle at low doses to promote growth.

***Practice in the UK: purchaser/processor level***

12. This control at farm level is complemented by the testing of milk for antibiotics undertaken by food businesses at various points in the supply chain.
13. By law, Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 requires that:
  - Food business operators must initiate procedures to ensure that raw milk is not placed on the market if it contains antibiotic residues in excess of regulated limits (Maximum Residue Limit - MRL) (MRLs relate to raw milk, not to processed milk or dairy products);
  - Food business operators must inform the competent authority where this requirement is not met, and take corrective measures;
  - A representative number of random samples of raw milk be tested to monitor the effectiveness of the initiated procedures.
14. It is up to individual food business operators (including milk producers) to determine their own sampling and testing regime, taking account of other testing undertaken in the distribution chain. Methods of testing milk samples are now extremely sophisticated and are capable of detecting antibiotics at very low levels.
15. Milk purchasers/processors in the UK routinely test tankers of milk arriving at the dairy processing centres to make sure that the milk they use is compliant with legal limits for antibiotics. If the milk is found to be contaminated above these levels, the whole load is disposed of and the source tracked back to the farm concerned.
16. In addition to this, milk purchasers/processors also regularly test individual farmers' milk for antibiotics. Anyone failing the test can be subject to a heavy financial penalty and milk from that farm is not accepted into the dairy until subsequent tests reveal that the product is compliant again. The testing and penalty regime has had a significant impact on the control of antibiotic residues in milk at farm level.
17. Dairy UK also leads an Antibiotics Working Group, which brings together processors, farmers, regulators and vets. The group works towards improving the use of antibiotics at farm level and

minimising the residues in milk. Examples include identifying the best analytical tests as well as engaging in the dissemination of guidance on antibiotic use at farm level.

### **Media statement**

18. The dairy industry goes above and beyond legal requirements to ensure that their milk does not contain antibiotic residues. These efforts are the result of a strong commitment to guarantee the highest standards of safety and hygiene for dairy products sold in the UK.
19. Milk is tested regularly from farm to fridge through stringent control measures and any issue is dealt with swiftly and efficiently. Antibiotic stewardship is paramount for dairy producers and processors alike and through the Dairy UK Antibiotics Working Group, the industry works towards improving the use of antibiotics at farm level and minimising the residues in milk. The UK dairy industry remains committed to working towards the continuous improvement of the current testing regimes and the measures in place to guarantee the safety of dairy products.

### **Media statement re O'Neill report on AMR**

20. The dairy industry goes above and beyond legal requirements to ensure that milk does not contain antibiotic residues. These efforts are the result of a strong commitment to guarantee the highest standards of safety and hygiene for dairy products sold in the UK. Milk is tested regularly from farm to fridge through stringent control measures and any issue is dealt with swiftly and efficiently.
21. Dairy UK agrees with the O'Neill report's recommendation on the reduction of antimicrobials in agriculture. Antibiotic stewardship is paramount for dairy producers and processors alike and through the Dairy UK Antibiotics Working Group, the industry works towards improving the use of antibiotics at farm level and minimising the residues in milk.
22. Dairy UK is also a member of the [Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance](#) (RUMA) and strongly supports the new RUMA task force which will look at how meaningful targets can be developed to replace, reduce and refine antibiotic use in UK agriculture. The task force will aim at identifying effective, evidence-based goals that work for the UK livestock sectors and protect animal welfare.
23. The UK dairy industry remains committed to working towards the continuous improvement of the current testing regimes and the measures in place to guarantee the safety of dairy products.