FÉDÉRATION EUROPÉENNE DES FABRICANTS D'ALIMENTS COMPOSÉS
EUROPÄISCHER VERBAND DER MISCHFUTTERINDUSTRIE
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THE FEED CHAIN IN ACTION 8

Time to recognise the role of animal nutrition science in boosting disease resistance in farm animals

Antimicrobial resistance is one of the biggest threats to society. A world where antibiotics are no longer able to cure human beings from currently considered non-lethal diseases is nothing less than a disaster scenario. Livestock farmers are asked to play their part by reducing the use of antibiotics while maintaining animal health and welfare. Step one would, therefore, be to provide farm animals with means to be able to better resist to pathogens in the first place and reduce the need for antibiotic treatment. This can be established through innovative animal nutrition strategies.

The EU feed industry fully embraces the current debate on antimicrobial resistance. Indeed, there is a long way to go in communicating our role as part of the solution. In a Eurobarometer publication on antimicrobial resistance from June 2016 it became clear that only 37% of Europeans is aware of the fact that antibiotic growth promoters are not allowed in animal feed since over 10 years. While many people may, therefore, incorrectly see us as part of the problem, there is in fact no doubt that adequate animal feeding strategies contribute to preserving the health of farm animals and reduce the need for medical treatment. It is not much different from human beings where the basis for optimal health lies in balanced nutrition, hygiene and proper living conditions. A healthy animal is an efficient animal, and an efficient animal will not need medical treatment to stay performant.

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A simple political and societal demand of "just use less antibiotics" falls short of the fully-fledged strategy livestock farmers need to make their contribution to the reduction targets. The scientific body of evidence is growing that interaction of feed with the gut microbiota of farm animals helps to boost health. The incorporation of feed ingredients with specific physical wellness functions is an example of how the immune system of farm animals can be stimulated.

The momentum is growing to achieve a change in mentality. If we can agree that nutrition has a beneficial effect on animal health preservation, then feed manufacturers should also be able to appropriately communicate this to livestock farmers. And if animal health preservation is an objective in the fight against AMR, then feeding strategies and animal nutrition science should be part of training programmes for livestock farmers in national action plans.

FEFAC is actively bringing its message on the role of animal nutrition in the fight against AMR to the attention, both on EU and international level. The CODEX Physical Working Group on AMR held in London which I attended on behalf of FEFAC from 29 November to 2 December 2016 agreed to include "strategies that prevent or reduce the need to use antimicrobial agents" in the future Terms of Reference for the planned revision of the CODEX code of practice on AMR, thus opening the door for balanced animal nutrition to be considered in this context.

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When it comes to AMR, we will need out of the box thinking. The feed industry can deliver its solutions to any type of animal species in any type of farming system, including organic. When the objective of the EU is to reduce the use and need for antibiotics at farm level, the EU feed industry counts on animal nutrition science to be part of the toolbox of solutions.

Predrag Persak,

Chair of the FEFAC Animal Nutrition Committee