

Danish Pig Producers to Halve Use of Critical Antibiotics

04 November 2014

DENMARK - With a brand new action plan, the Danish Pig Research Centre is aiming to halve the use of the antibiotic, tetracycline, before the end of 2015. At the same time, the current Yellow Card scheme will be modified to focus on use of 'critical' antibiotics.

Whenever there is an outbreak of disease, such as diarrhoea, in a pig herd, antibiotics are needed to treat them. Among the options available is Tetracycline. The medical profession has expressed concern that the use of tetracycline may increase resistance prevalence in general. As a consequence, the Danish pig industry has voluntarily set itself an ambitious target of halving the use of tetracyclines in the coming year.

Claus Fertin, Director of the Danish Pig Research Centre, told the Herning Congress recently: "As pig producers account for a large proportion of antibiotic consumption in Denmark, it is quite natural that we should also take responsibility for the future. We are seeing how resistant bacteria, such as MRSA, are spreading in the human population, making the treatment of infections more difficult. It is, therefore, important that we take precautionary steps to pre-empt some of the potential risks of resistance spreading in the future. With this voluntary step, we are endeavouring to help ensure the availability of critical antibiotics in the future."

Danish pig producers reduced consumption of antibiotics by 13 per cent between 2009 and 2013.

Dr Fertin continued: "Denmark is a role model in producing pig meat with low antibiotic usage. I would urge our Food Minister to seek to persuade other countries to reduce their use of tetracycline and other agents that are important in the treatment of humans. Denmark is not a desert island. The challenges posed by the spread of antibiotic resistance resistance issue must be solved internationally."

In order to safeguard animal welfare and keep pig mortality at acceptable levels, there may be a need to use other antibiotics. The view of the veterinary experts is that, in many cases, Tetracycline can be replaced by tiamulin, which is not used in the treatment of humans.

In addition to the reduction of tetracycline, the Danish Pig Research Centre also plans to modify the current Yellow Card scheme.

In collaboration with Den Danske Dyrlægeforening (the Danish Veterinary Association), it is proposed that the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration's Yellow Card scheme be further developed, encouraging a switch from agents that are critically necessary for human medicine to treatments that are only used for livestock. This will help prevent resistance developing in antibiotics currently used to treat humans. The current Yellow Card scheme, which came into force in 2010, is concerned only with the total use of antibiotics rather than that of individual antibiotics.

"With this scheme, we have found a method whereby the potential risks of development of resistance can be lowered without us compromising how we treat sick animals in pig herds," explained the Chairman of the Danish Veterinarian's Association's Pig Section, Kristian Vieklide.

ThePigSite News Desk