

Position paper on Antimicrobial Resistance

November 2016

Introduction

In September 2016, the G20 recognised Antimicrobial Resistance as posing “*a serious threat to public health, growth and global economic stability*”¹. Antimicrobial Resistance or AMR occurs when microorganisms mutate and become resistant to antimicrobial drugs. As a consequence of these mutations, those medicines that are used currently become ineffective; the illness is prolonged and may even become life-threatening.

Euro Coop warmly welcomes that AMR is currently high on the global political agenda. This important issue was discussed both at the G20 that took place on the 4th and 5th of September 2016, as well as on the 21st of September 2016 in the occasion on a [United Nations High-Level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance](#). Importantly, AMR should indeed be tackled globally given that **bacteria do not stop at borders**. A [Eurobarometer](#) report published in June 2016 shows that overall EU consumption of antibiotics has decreased by six percentage points in the past seven years. However, this is mostly true for countries in Northern Europe, while in the South antibiotic consumption has increased. **Collective effort is still needed.** As such, **Euro Coop regrets that AMR was not included in the 2017 European Commission work plan.**

Euro Coop welcomes the [roadmap](#) and public consultation launched by the European Commission “*Communication on a One-Health Action Plan to support Member States in the fight against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)*” and takes the opportunity to provide its position on the matter.

Euro Coop welcomes that the European Commission has evaluated the 2011-2016 Action Plan against the rising threats from antimicrobial resistance and calls for the next Action Plan to build upon this evaluation, specifically with regards to continuing with the concept of a one health approach and with supporting Member States in developing and implementing national action plans.

Euro Coop calls for this political momentum to result in concrete actions counteracting AMR and welcomes the involvement of different stakeholders – ranging from the government, consumers, farmers, the industry, retailers – to play their part in addressing this worrying public health threat.

¹ European Commission – statement. G20 Leaders’ Communique Hangzhou Summit. 5 September 2016. Available here: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-16-2967_en.htm

Consumer co-operatives are addressing AMR

Different stakeholders have different roles to play in tackling AMR. Addressing AMR is one of those issues imbedded in the 5th Co-operative Principle of “Education, training, and information”, in this case to consumers, as well as the 7th Co-operative Principle “Concern for the Community”. **Consumer co-operatives are therefore playing their part in addressing AMR** by e.g. banning the use of antibiotics from their suppliers, selling exclusively antibiotic-free meat, and investing in research and development to assess current levels of antibiotics used in a certain supply chain.

Specifically, **Coop Italy** has implemented measures to guide breeders in terms of policies for the use of sustainable medications with the aim of reducing the use of antibiotics. According to Coop Italy, the foundations to achieving the best results are a thorough knowledge of supply chains, an adequate administration of the farm, both at management level as well as with regards to facilities and equipment, optimal animal feeding, good hygiene practices and a keen focus on animal welfare. To this end, Coop Italy has launched a review of its Breeding Codes with the rules and the best practices needed for an even more responsible use of medication in general and of antibiotics in particular. The Breeding Codes promote research and may go beyond EU legislation. Where medication is necessary, the set of rules and best practices stipulate how to make a responsible use of drugs with the aim of (1) protecting animal welfare, (2) guaranteeing the quality of meat and its origin, and (3) combating antimicrobial resistance. As of September 2016, Coop Italy is not using antibiotics in certain supply chains such as those of some special poultry products including fowl, Garangallo and Livornese.

Coop Denmark has taken the strong and ambitious position of demanding that suppliers do not make use of antibiotics as a prophylactic measure or for the sole purpose of supporting animal growth. Although this position comes with enforcement and monitoring challenges, Coop Denmark is of the view that there simply is no other way and that society as a whole must play its part in this global issue².

Similarly, **Coop Norway** is committed to only selling antibiotic-free chicken and has also pledged to providing consumers with narasin-free³ chicken⁴.

The **S Group** in Finland has been involved in important educational campaigns via blogs for instance which inform consumers about antibiotic resistance. Given the high market share of the S Group in Finland, the media is particularly interested to find out how the S Group monitors the issue.

All own-brand meat and poultry products sold at **the Co-operative Group** in the United Kingdom come from animals for which the use of antibiotics was not allowed, unless there was an approval from a veterinarian to address a certain health issue. This co-operative has also launched a programme – that is of highest priority – that aims to minimise the use of antibiotics by its suppliers. For instance, the Co-operative Group has been collaborating with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to evaluate the use of antibiotics in its different supply chains⁵.

² More information available here : <https://www.coop.se/Vart--ansvar/Hallbar-verksamhet/Coops-forhallningssatt-i-djurvalfardsfragor/>

³ Narasin is classified as a feed additive in Europe and is used to prevent the development of bowel disease in chicken. It is however classified as an antibiotic in other regions, which is why Coop Norway has banned its use in the feed of their chickens.

⁴ More information available here: <https://coop.no/merkevarer/dagligvare/coop-smak-forskjellen/kylling---smak-forskjellen/FAQ-kylling-fra-DSH/>

⁵ More information available here : <http://www.co-operativefood.co.uk/food-matters/farming-food/animal-welfare/>

Consumer co-operatives are committed to the health and well-being of their consumer-members and will keep on taking measures to safeguard their interests. Euro Coop is open to liaise with the European Commission to exchange best practices and potentially expand efforts devolved in the fight against AMR.

Are current measures enough to counteract AMR?

Simply put, NO.

A must-read review of Antimicrobial Resistance chaired by Lord O' Neill found that, if the present status quo is maintained, **the current 700.000 global yearly AMR-related deaths would become 10 million by 2050 and that "the cost in terms of lost global production between now and 2050 would be an enormous 100 trillion USD"**⁶.

This report specifies that **10 important actions** are needed, which are summarized below. Each of these actions can and should be carried out by a certain subset of stakeholders. By working together, all can be addressed.

1. A massive global public awareness campaign

In this context, it is of interest to underline that the same Eurobarometer cited previously reveals that **57%** of Europeans are not aware that antibiotics are ineffective against viruses and that **44%** do not know that antibiotics are not effective against the cold and the flu⁷. Therefore, it is imperative to launch an informative and educational campaign targeted at the general public, especially adults.

2. Improve hygiene and prevent the spread of infection

All countries around the world need to act on this point. Indeed, the more people improve overall hygiene, the less they get infected, and the more the risk of AMR is minimised.

3. Reduce unnecessary use of antimicrobials in agriculture and their dissemination into the environment

Antibiotic use in agriculture and livestock should be reduced to the necessary minimum. This can be achieved by determining appropriate antibiotic use in the relevant supply chains. An example of best practice in this regard has been put forward by the Co-operative Group in the UK in the paragraph above.

4. Improve global surveillance of drug resistance and antimicrobial consumption in humans and animals

In his review, Lord O' Neill suggests that, together with the World Health Organisation (WHO), governments should collect data regarding antimicrobials consumption, the levels of resistance, and the biological reasons for this resistance.

5. Promote new, rapid diagnostics to cut unnecessary use of antibiotics

The AMR review suggests that rich countries should take the responsibility and lead in this respect. A Global Innovation Fund for AMR could be set up with the aim of supporting early-stage research in this area.

6. Promote development and use of vaccines and alternatives

7. Improve the numbers, pay and recognition of people working in infectious disease

⁶ Tackling drug-resistant infections globally: final report and recommendations, May 2016. Available here: http://amr-review.org/sites/default/files/160525_Final%20paper_with%20cover.pdf

⁷ Antimicrobial resistance; antibiotics in the EU – use & perceptions. Available here: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_food-safety/amr/docs/eb445_amr_generalfactsheet_en.pdf

8. Establish a Global Innovation Fund for early-stage and non-commercial research

9. Better incentives to promote investment for new drugs and improving existing ones

10. Build a global coalition for real action – via the G20 and the UN

Regarding this last point, and as touched upon previously, Euro Coop welcomes that AMR is currently high on the global political agenda. Euro Coop would however like to see more swift action taken from the European Commission. Specifically, Euro Coop is generally pleased with President Juncker's State of the Union speech that was given on the 14th of September 2016 and it welcomes the setting of concrete goals, especially with regards to (1) setting up a **European Solidarity Corps** which would enable young people across the EU to volunteer where their help is needed most and (2) with the Commission's stance to stay by farmers, particularly when going through difficult moments. However, Euro Coop regrets that important words such as "health" and major public health threats such as AMR and obesity were not mentioned during the speech. We surely need a Europe that protects and preserves the European way of life, that empowers citizens, that defends at home and abroad, that takes responsibility⁸, but most of all we need a healthy Europe, a Europe that is not burdened by the public health threats that it faces today – AMR being one of the most pressing to tackle.

Taking into consideration that the current AMR action plan expires in November 2016, Euro Coop calls on the European Commission to approve an AMR action plan for the years to come. Concrete goals to be achieved are to be set in order to help Member States in their fight to limit antibiotic consumption and misuse.

Conclusion

To conclude, Euro Coop wishes that the political momentum gained with regards to addressing Anti-Microbial Resistance globally will lead to **concrete preventive and monitoring measures**, as well as an overall decrease of antimicrobial resistance and misuse of medicines. Not considering AMR as a priority globally is simply not an option. In this respect, **consumer co-operatives are already addressing this issue** as it has a direct impact on consumer health and well-being. As such, Euro Coop calls on all stakeholders – ranging from the government, consumers, farmers, the industry, and retailers – to play their part in order to tackle this important public health threat.

⁸ Priorities for Europe as listed in President Juncker's State of the Union speech on 14 September 2016.

About Euro Coop

Euro Coop is the voice of the co-operative retailers in Europe. Our associations brings together the national associations of consumer co-operatives in **19 European countries**, which represent **4,500 local/regional cooperatives, employing 500,000 citizens** across Europe and operating **36,000 stores** which serve **32 million consumer-members** daily. Euro Coop's members together are Europe's second strongest retail force – accounting for € 76 billion in annual turnover from sales.

Euro Coop's Secretariat in Brussels represents the interests of its members before the European Institutions and facilitates the inter-member exchange between the national associations. More information is available at www.eurocoop.coop.

For more information, please contact:

Silvia Schmidt

Policy Officer for Food and Retail

sschmidt@eurocoop.coop

Tel: + 32 2 285 00 74