

# FARM ANTIBIOTIC USE AND HUSBANDRY

## BETTER UNDERSTANDING THROUGH DATA



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A survey was carried out of the antibiotic usage of Soil Association certified farmers during the period 01/06/2018 to 31/05.2019. We have been able to compare these findings with the UK national averages for antibiotic use by species. This project aims to focus attention on how big a role welfare could play in national efforts to limit antibiotic use to cases of real necessity. Antibiotic use in the sample of Soil Association certified organic farms surveyed for this project was four times lower than the UK national average. The particularly low uses in pigs and poultry are based on a small sample size but further data collection is planned.

UK farm antibiotic use reduced by nearly 50% between 2014 and 2018, but overall use remains far too high, and the case could be made for a stronger focus on husbandry practices when considering long-term antibiotic reductions at a national level. UK-wide husbandry practices have not fundamentally changed as a result of these recent reductions in antibiotic use, as intensive farming remains dominant in pig and poultry production. Certain diseases remain routine and to control them there has been increased reliance on the use of alternative medication, such as zinc oxide to deal with post-weaning diarrhoea in piglets, and ionophores to deal with the intestinal disease coccidiosis in poultry.

### LESSONS FROM THE HIGH-HUSBANDRY REQUIREMENTS OF ORGANIC

Organic standards aim to promote good health and welfare so that disease is exceptional rather than routine. By aiming to minimise disease, these standards are also likely to reduce the need for antibiotic treatments.

Some key organic standards include:

- Access to the outdoors
- Lower stocking density
- Use of appropriate, resilient breeds, including slower-growing chickens
- Later weaning
- Appropriate diets

As part of this project we interviewed a number of Soil Association organic farmers, and asked them what key husbandry factors do they practice to minimise disease and keep antibiotic use low. They said:

- A low stocking rate
- Good stockmanship
- Good nutrition
- A low-stress environment
- Breeding specifically for health traits, more than production
- Later weaning of piglets and avoiding mixing of groups
- Improving cow tracks to avoid foot problems
- Culling of repeatedly lame cows or those with a history of multiple treatments
- Investment in housing

This data indicates that these organic farms use on average four times less the amount of antibiotics than the UK national average.

	UK average 2019 (mg/pcu)	Soil Association Organic 2019 (mg/pcu)		
OVERALL	31	7.46	SA Organic sample is 4x lower than UK average	SA Organic sample is 76% less than average
DAIRY	22.5	10.66	SA Organic sample is 2x lower than UK average	SA Organic sample is 53% less than average
BEEF	24.5	7.22	SA Organic sample is 3.5x lower than UK average	SA Organic sample is 70% less than average
SHEEP	16.7	3.33	SA Organic sample is 5x lower than UK average	SA Organic sample is 80% less than average
PIGS	110	1.42	SA Organic sample is 77x lower than UK average	SA Organic sample is 98% less than average
BROILERS	17	2.95	SA Organic sample is 6x lower than UK average	SA Organic sample is 82% less than average
TURKEYS	42	0	/	/
LAYERS	0.68	0	/	/

\*Up-to-date sheep data not available from WANS. We've sourced the figures used above for sheep, here: [https://reading.org/certifier/files/Fronta2019avet\\_77.pdf](https://reading.org/certifier/files/Fronta2019avet_77.pdf)



See the data summary [here](#)



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The Alliance's full report will be published later in March.