

FARM ANTIBIOTIC USE AND HUSBANDRY

LOWERING USE THROUGH GOOD HUSBANDRY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY APRIL 2021

New data shows that organic livestock farms certified by the Soil Association have much lower antibiotic use than the average levels previously found in national monitoring of all UK livestock farming. The Alliance to Save our Antibiotics calling for organic farming's high husbandry standards to be recognised as a solution for lowering farm antibiotic use and want to see higher health and welfare standards for all British livestock.

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	Organic is 4x lower than UK average	Organic is 76% less than average
DAIRY	22.5	10.66	Organic is 2x lower than UK average	Organic is 53% less than average
BEEF	24.5	7.22	Organic is 3.5x lower than UK average	Organic is 70% less than average
SHEEP	16.7	3.33	Organic is 5x lower than UK average	Organic is 80% less than average
PIGS	110	1.42	Organic is 77x lower than UK average	Organic is almost 99% less than average
BROILERS	17	2.95	Organic is 6x lower than UK average	Organic is just over 80% less than average
TURKEYS	42	0	/	/
LAYERS	0.68	0	/	/

*Up-to-date sheep data not available from WASS. We've sourced the figure used above for sheep, here: <https://reading.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/wass-2019.pdf>

- See the data summary [here](#)
- Read about the farmer interviews [here](#)
- Sign up for the Alliance to Save our Antibiotics newsletter [here](#)
- Read the Soil Association organic standards [here](#)
- Read the full report [here](#)