



**Game Feed  
Trade  
Association**

RESPONSIBLE USE OF MEDICINES IN AGRICULTURE ALLIANCE  
**ruma**

**Countryside  
Alliance**



*The*  
**NATIONAL  
GAMEKEEPERS'  
Organisation**



**Veterinary  
Medicines  
Directorate**



## **Gamebird Joint Communication 2023**

As the second phase of optimising antibiotic use in Livestock sectors, RUMA's Targets Taskforce 2 <https://www.ruma.org.uk/targets-task-force-2/> (TTF2), draws to a close, the game sector, along with some others, needs to maintain focus on further reductions, alongside responsible use. If we are to meet the target that we set ourselves for the TTF2 period, which ends in 2024, we will need to make significant further reductions in 2023. Below are some summary figures from the 2022 collection, along with some reinforcement of the rules and regulations as well as some exciting initiatives to help take our sector forward. As we look to make further sustainable reductions in the prescription of antibiotics, there needs to be greater focus on improving systems, raising welfare standards and research so that we create a sector that is less prone to disease challenges and is consequently less dependent on medication.

Comparison with 2019 and 2021 show encouraging results (2020 figures were somewhat misleading, due to the effects of Covid-19).

1. In 2022, there was a meaningful 33% overall reduction in antibiotics used compared with 2019, and a 25% reduction compared with 2021. This is in line with our TTF2 target.
2. There has been a fall of 82% in the use of in-feed antibiotics and a fall of 66% in overall use of antibiotics since 2016.
3. HP-CIAs (Highest Priority – Critically Important Antibiotics) such as Enrofloxacin showed a 40% reduction since 2019, and a 63% reduction since 2016.

### **Highlighting the rules**

1. All antibiotics must be responsibly prescribed by a UK based vet who has the birds under his/her care, and ideally by a vet who is a member of the BVPA (British Veterinary Poultry Association).
2. Whilst the use of HP-CIAs has been successfully reduced, we as a sector are still using proportionally too much and therefore there must be renewed pressure to only use these antibiotics as a last resort and with good reason, e.g., where culture and sensitivity tests suggest it is the only suitable option.
3. In-Feed antibiotics may only be considered as an appropriate method of administration to treat birds following consultation, diagnosis and direction by the veterinary surgeon. The third and fourth pages of this Joint Communication are the VMD/RCVS guidance document "Reminder of best practice on prescribing and supply of antibiotics for gamebirds"

*The following veterinary practices support this document: Avivets, Chipping Norton Veterinary Hospital, Crowshall Veterinary Services, Dalton's Game Consultancy Ltd., Field & Forest Veterinary Consultancy, Garth Pig Practice Ltd., Hafren Veterinary Group, Howells Veterinary Services Ltd., Mount Vets Poultry & Gamebird Group, Norcal, Poultry Health Services, Sandhill Veterinary Services, Slate Hall Veterinary Practice, South Downs Veterinary Consultancy, St David's Game Bird Services & Wood Veterinary Group.*

## 2023 Initiatives

1. Individual Antibiotic Usage - We will continue to encourage all gamebird breeders, rearers and keepers to engage with their vet and calculate their antibiotic usage each rearing season for both partridges and pheasants. This is part of the Trusted Game accreditation scheme and should enable poor performers to receive targeted assistance to find ways of reducing their reliance on antibiotics.
2. Game Sector Training – This standardised curriculum has been designed by individual members of the BVPA game bird subcommittee in conjunction with keepers and game farmers. The programme is for keepers of breeding birds, hatcheries, rearing farms and shoots and covers a wide range of topics and was rolled out as a pilot scheme in late 2021 and had considerable uptake in 2022. The sector will build on this in 2023.
3. The AIC Game Feed Committee (GFC), representing the major UK game feed compounders, released the FAR (Feed Adviser Register) Game Feed Module 1 last June. The module was put together by AIC compounder members with support from BASC, BGA, BPVA, GFA, NGO, the game bird veterinary community, and has been well received by the industry. The comprehensive course covers the fundamentals of game bird farm and shoot feed planning, and the nutritional link to animal health, welfare and productivity and has so far seen 35 participants complete the course with 22 others signing up to take it. The GFC are currently planning FAR Game Feed Module 2 with a target release date of May/June 2024.
4. There will be a shift in focus toward further reductions in antibiotic use being achieved through raising standards and improving systems and their attendant Health and Welfare impacts. Thus far most of our attention has been on reducing unnecessary or unjustified prescribing of antibiotics.
5. Recent testing has indicated unacceptable levels of residues of lasalocids (Avatec) in game meat from pheasant and partridge. This is believed to be largely accidental, but the sector is looking at ways of solving this problem. A poster has been designed to be displayed on pallets of feed containing Avatec, articles have been featured in sector media streams and further educational work is under consideration to determine the best ways of taking this workstream forward.
6. Assurance - Assurance and auditing in the game rearing sector is a significant step forward in raising standards. Development of the BGA game farm assurance scheme, which began in 2021, will contribute significantly to a sustained antibiotic reduction process. The scheme is being further developed to increase levels of engagement across the sector.
7. The recently launched Trusted Game Health and Welfare scheme will, along with the BGA Assurance scheme, be fundamental to the sectors' efforts to reduce antibiotic use by improving systems and Health and Welfare standards (as per point 4 above) through widespread engagement. Participation in these schemes will help to reduce the need for antibiotics and should be encouraged across the whole sector.
8. Pen Scoring Matrix - Developed by gamebird vets, the veterinary pen scoring matrix was launched and developed throughout the sector in 2021. This will form part of a wider initiative to promote better management and welfare through improvements to the environment that birds are released into and relates directly to point 4. Antibiotic use immediately post release accounts for a disproportionately high percentage of total use and any reduction in antibiotic use at release will contribute significantly to the cause.

9. Much of the antibiotic used immediately post-release is used to treat Hexamita, and an ongoing research project led by sector vets is aiming to develop a better understanding of this parasite and how to treat the conditions it causes.
10. Highest Priority Critically Important Antibiotics (HP-CIA) - From soluble antibiotic collection data, the GFA in conjunction with gamebird vets will continue to amass data relating to the use of fluoroquinolone and focus on reducing their use.
11. Data collected so far suggests that a significant proportion of fluoroquinolone use is for the treatment of bacterial infection in chicks during the first week of life. It is questionable whether this has quantifiable long-term benefits or whether it merely moves the problem to later in the rearing cycle. Yolk sac and other bacterial infections should only be treated in the first week of life where such treatment can be fully justified.
12. Macrolides - Macrolides are on the European Medicines Agency's amber caution list. The macrolides Tylosin and Tylvalosin, as well as Pleuromutilins (including Tiamulin) should only be used where there is no clinically effective antibiotic available in a lower risk category.
13. The value of Mycoplasma gallisepticum testing – This is increasingly recognised as important in the effort to manage Mycoplasma infection (bulgy eye). A combination of testing and clinical assessment of the birds gives hope for controlling this difficult condition in future, for the benefit of the whole sector down to the smallest shoot. This will also help drive down antibiotic usage.

***Only together can we carve out the changes necessary to become sustainable for future generations.***