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PEDIGREE MAGAZINE

INSIDE NEXT WEEK'S PAPER

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Animal health

Some home truths about antibiotics

If we don't start to use antibiotics differently, then it's not just our animals' health that will be affected, it's our own and our families', writes **Tommy Heffernan**



The One Health campaign we have been working on with the Department of Agriculture is all about raising awareness and understanding of what AMR, or antibiotic resistance, is and how it affects us all.

I've learned a huge amount about how big a threat antibiotic resistance is to our own health, our animals' health and our environment.

However, sometimes it takes a personal experience to really make us sit up and take action. This week, the importance of the topic hit home.

It started with a simple cut on my elbow. I don't even know how it happened. I just woke up one morning with a hot and throbbing elbow and realised something was wrong. Not one for panicking, I poulticed it and took some ibuprofen.

The work I had been doing on infections for the past weeks was on my mind, and 12 hours later, when the pain wasn't getting better, I knew I had the beginnings of cellulitis. It was time for a medical opinion.

The doctor started me on a course of amoxicillin clavulanic acid, an antibiotic commonly used to treat disease in farm animals. The diagnosis was septic bursitis of the elbow, and thankfully within 24 hours the pain and swelling was going down as the antibiotics were working.

It hit me like a train. Something as simple as a scratch could be much worse without antibiotics. Everything I was telling people about how much of a precious resource these medicines are, I was now personally living out.

Antibiotics have revolutionised human medicine and added 20 years to our average life span, as illustrated in the below image published in a newspaper during the second world war. We all depend on antibiotics to treat disease in ourselves and our animals. This campaign has aimed to explain that they are no longer working as effectively as they were. The bacteria



A joint awareness campaign by the Irish Farmers Journal and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

are not being controlled by antibiotics because they have been overused. It is time to be more responsible about when and how we use them. It is vital to try to avoid using them unless your vet has advised that they are absolutely necessary.

Vets and doctors have been informed of their role in prescribing antibiotics responsibly. Farmers have the responsibility of ensuring the health and welfare of their animals. If animal health can be optimised and disease prevented, it's a 'win-win' for everyone as there won't be a need to use antibiotics in the first place.

It is accepted that some animals may get sick on our farms, and there will be a need to use antibiotics. We must work harder to keep animals healthy. We can get advice from our vet and farm advisers so that we can do better.

We must also remember the bacteria we treat against make their way into the environment, and this is also a potential source of resistant bacteria. By using less antibiotics in our animals and ourselves, we reduce the amount of antibiotics released into the environment driving the development of resistant bacteria.

The key One Health message is to work to improve animal health and reduce our use of antibiotics. We must limit our antibiotic use with the principle of "only as much as necessary, and as little as possible". This won't make our farms any less profitable, it will contribute to a more sustainable future for farming.

Changing how we use antibiotics and reducing our need to use them sometimes takes courage, but there are farmers who have done it. Being more responsible about how we use antibiotics means doing things slightly differently, reviewing our farm management and animal husbandry practices because the goalposts have moved. Antibiotic resistance is a real challenge and we can't put our heads in the sand. In fact, legislation coming in 2022 will mean we won't be allowed to.

We all have a responsibility to keep antibiotics working for ourselves, our families and future generations.

Who's breeding what: a county by county breakdown

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- ✓ We report from the home of beef production in Canada.
- ✓ **County by county** breakdown of all pedigree cattle breeds.
- ✓ Key goals for the **sheep breeding** sector.

Shane Murphy,
PEDIGREE EDITOR

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