

Supermarket antibiotics policies assessment 2019

January 2020



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Summary

This is the second assessment by the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics of the publicly available antibiotics policies of the ten leading British supermarkets, who together hold a 95% share of Great Britain's grocery market. The aim of publishing this appraisal is to encourage openness and transparency in the food chain, highlighting which supermarkets have the strongest policies for ending the overuse of farm antibiotics and which ones still have to act. Our earlier assessment, published in 2017, found major differences between supermarkets, and this latest assessment finds that many of these differences remain, although some significant progress is also being made.

The supermarkets' public policies show that six supermarkets have bans on their suppliers using antibiotics routinely for disease prevention (Co-op, Lidl, M&S, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose), one has a ban in some species (Morrison's), one recommends that routine use be avoided but has no ban (Aldi) and two as yet have no restrictions other than minimum legal restrictions (Asda and Iceland).

As in 2017, we found that Waitrose is the supermarket with the most comprehensive antibiotic policies, with M&S and Tesco having the next-best policies.

Iceland was the only supermarket with no publicly available policies and no antibiotic-reduction strategy in place. Iceland, however, told us that it is in the process of developing a policy.

Waitrose and M&S are the only supermarkets that do not permit their suppliers to use the antibiotic colistin, which is used as a last resort in human medicine for treating life-threatening infections. Morrison's will also ban the antibiotic from use in 2020. Tesco says that its suppliers of pig and poultry meat did not use it during the last year but has no ban on the antibiotic, and other supermarkets continue to allow colistin use in certain circumstances.

Transparency of supermarket antibiotic use has increased in the past two years, although much more

and better data is still needed. In 2017, our assessment found that no supermarkets had published data on their antibiotic use. However, since then six supermarkets have published some antibiotic-use data (Asda, Co-op, Lidl, M&S, Tesco and Waitrose) although only Asda, Lidl, Tesco and Waitrose have published data for 2018. A YouGov survey carried out in November 2019 for the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics found that a large majority of the general public thinks that supermarkets should publish antibiotic-use data they possess: 96% of 1,897 people who expressed an opinion thought that supermarkets should publish their data.

None of the supermarkets publish good data on antibiotic use distinguished by farming system – an important distinction to help with analysis and to encourage best-possible farm practice. Such analysis would include, for example, intensive production, pasture-fed, free-range and organic. Poor welfare systems and health problems associated with intensification are known to contribute to higher levels of antibiotic use, but only Asda and Lidl provide some very limited data on antibiotic use by system. Supermarkets are known to be in possession of data by husbandry system, particularly in the case of poultry, and should publish this information.





'In the light of the UK's forthcoming exit from the EU, there is a clear need for unambiguous domestic policies which ensure that antibiotics are used judiciously in human and animal medicine. The use of important antibiotics to routinely mass medicate groups of livestock does not constitute judicious use, and should have no place in any antibiotic-reduction strategy for the UK.'

Professor Jane Dacre, President of the Royal College of Physicians, 2016

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Introduction

In recent years, British farm antibiotic use has been cut very significantly: the latest government data shows that the sales of veterinary antibiotics fell by 50% between 2014 and 2018¹. Although there has been no major government action against the overuse of farm antibiotics, the government-commissioned Review on Antimicrobial Resistance (“O’Neill Review”)², which called for major cuts in global farm antibiotic use, seems to have had a galvanising effect.

A number of initiatives have contributed to this fall, including important voluntary action taken by farmers and farming organisations like the British Poultry Council and the National Pig Association. It is likely that greater media attention, growing public pressure, shifts in position from some industry organisations, new industry groupings being set up and the expectation of tighter regulation have all played a part in motivating the reductions. New supermarket antibiotic policies are also playing an important role.

Both the poultry and pig industries now collect and publish annual data on their antibiotic-use and this has had a significant impact: greater transparency has created pressure on those overusing antibiotics to reduce their use. Improved data has also enabled the industry group the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) to set voluntary antibiotic-use reduction targets by species³. Red Tractor standards for the poultry industry, but not the pig industry, have also voluntarily prohibited preventative antibiotic group treatments and all use of the last-resort antibiotic colistin⁴.

Supermarkets, however, are in a particularly influential position when it comes to achieving responsible farm antibiotic use. The ten leading supermarkets account for 95% of Great Britain’s grocery market⁵ and they set product specifications which their farmers and suppliers have to meet. Large supermarket chains are often in a much stronger position than other buyers, for example smaller food-service companies (restaurants, hotels, catering companies), for setting standards for their suppliers due to their large market share. It is for this reason that we are focusing on what actions these companies are taking.

Most British supermarkets have been introducing new policies aimed at achieving responsible use. Sometimes they have also been requiring suppliers to provide data on their antibiotic use and eliminate routine and inappropriate use.



The 2017 Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics assessment of supermarket action, however, showed that supermarket transparency was very poor, as none had published data on their antibiotic use⁶. Within a week of the Alliance report receiving widespread media coverage, Waitrose, M&S and Asda published some antibiotic-usage data⁷, with the Co-op following a few months later. Lidl, which up until then had no published antibiotic policy, published a very basic policy on its website when contacted by The Guardian newspaper about our assessment⁷.

These supermarket actions in response to our 2017 report demonstrate the importance of publicly holding them to account.

Earlier this year, a new industry-led group, the Food Industry Initiative on Antimicrobials (FIIA) was announced, which aims to bring together retailers, manufacturers, processors and food-service companies to promote more responsible antibiotic use in the food chain⁹. FIIA has already announced that it plans to collect antibiotic-use data. However, if this action is to be useful in creating pressure for high users of antibiotics to reduce their use or improve their husbandry, it will be important for the data to be fully published, and for it to include information on use by supermarket and by farming system. As yet, no such commitments to transparency have been made.

Nine of the ten leading supermarkets covered in this assessment are now members of the FIIA. Only Iceland is not a member. This assessment finds that Iceland is also the only supermarket with no publicly

available antibiotics policy and no antibiotic-reduction strategy, so it is perhaps not surprising they are not yet participating in this initiative.

For a number of years, it has also been known that new regulations limiting farm antibiotic use were likely to be introduced. Since 2014, the European Union has been discussing how to end routine antibiotic use in farming and, towards the end of last year, new rules were finally agreed which will come into force in January 2022. The new EU legislation will ban all routine antibiotic use including all preventative group treatments¹⁰.

Since this legislation only comes into force in over two years' time, it will not automatically apply in the UK. Although the government has said that it plans to apply most of the legislation post-Brexit, it has not committed to the ban on group prevention despite a call to do so from many of the UK's leading medical organisations¹¹.

However, if the UK does not set high statutory standards, those producers, or supermarkets, who refuse to adopt good voluntary measures may have an economic advantage as their costs may in some cases be lower. This assessment of supermarkets' policies shows that major differences in standards are already very real. Unless high statutory standards are set, at least matching EU standards, then post-Brexit trade deals could lead to even greater economic pressure on those attempting to use antibiotics responsibly and a greater market share for those willing to misuse these crucially important medicines.



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How information was gathered for this assessment

At the start of this project, we wrote to the ten leading supermarkets to let them know that we were undertaking this assessment and to inform them of the key questions we would be using for assessing their publicly available policies. The supermarkets all responded and were all willing to speak to us about the work they have been doing. All but Iceland had publicly available policies, and Iceland told us that they are currently in the process of developing a policy.



Box 1

Questions put to supermarkets

The eight questions we put to the supermarkets were:

1. Do you have a publicly available policy on farm antibiotic use? In particular, does your policy ban suppliers from using purely preventative antibiotic treatment as group treatments when no disease has been diagnosed in any of the animals in the group?
2. Does the policy ban suppliers from using antibiotics for routine prevention?
3. Does the policy restrict the use of the “high-priority critically important antibiotics” (modern cephalosporins and fluoroquinolones) so that these antibiotics can only be used where sensitivity shows that other treatments would not be effective, and so that they are never used for prevention or for group treatments?
4. Does the policy ban the use of the last-resort antibiotic colistin?
5. Do you have an antibiotic-reduction strategy?
6. Do you monitor antibiotic use in your suppliers?
7. Do you publish antibiotic-usage data?
8. Do you publish antibiotic-usage data by farming system?

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Background to some of the questions

Using antibiotics routinely for disease prevention

Using antibiotics for growth promotion has been banned in the EU since 2006 and since then all farm antibiotic use has been under veterinary prescription. However, using antibiotics routinely for disease prevention remains legal in the UK and in most of Europe even though such use is now widely seen as unacceptable since it is a major cause of antibiotic resistance. For this reason, the EU will be banning all routine antibiotic use, including all group prevention, on 28 January 2022, but the legislation will not automatically apply in the UK.

Restricting the use of high-priority critically important antibiotics

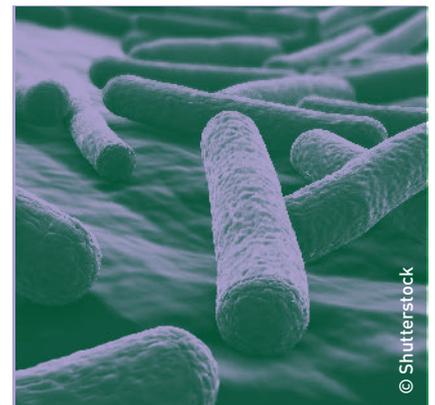
Certain antibiotic families, including the fluoroquinolone antibiotics and the modern cephalosporin antibiotics, are classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “high-priority critically important antibiotics in human medicine” (HPClAs). The WHO advocates that policy makers should prioritise reducing the use of these antibiotics in farming due to their importance in human medicine and because the WHO says that evidence shows that their use in livestock contributes to higher levels of resistance in human infections.

The Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics believes that the use of these antibiotics should be restricted to use in individual, sick animals where no other treatments are likely to work. These antibiotics should never be used for mass medication nor for any form of disease prevention, even in individual animals.

Government data shows that the farm use of these two families of antibiotic has been cut by nearly 60% between 2014 and 2018¹, but use nevertheless remains much higher than necessary.

Ending use of last-resort antibiotic colistin

No new antibiotics have been discovered for 40 years for treating a wide range of infections caused by certain bacterial infections such as E.coli. As a result of this “discovery gap”, for certain life-threatening infections when no other antibiotics are working, doctors have begun prescribing as a last resort colistin, an old antibiotic which was previously avoided in human medicine due to its high level of toxicity. However, colistin can also be used for mass medication in livestock when it is added to animal feed or drinking water.



In 2015, a new type of colistin resistance was discovered¹² and many scientists believe it developed in livestock and transmitted to humans. Since then, British farmers have mostly avoided the use of colistin, and use has fallen by 99.5%. However, while Red Tractor poultry standards now prohibit colistin use, use continues in the pig industry, albeit at a very low level¹. The Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics believes a total ban on colistin use in farming is needed due to its current importance as a last-resort treatment in human medicine, but so far the government has refused to take action.

Publishing antibiotic-use data, including by farming system

The publication in recent years of species-specific antibiotic-use data by the poultry and pig industries has contributed to significant reductions in antibiotic use, enabling targets to be set by sector and providing farmers with more information about their own use and how it compares with other farms. Unfortunately, neither the pig nor poultry industry publish data on use by farming system, such as intensive, higher-welfare indoor systems, free-range or organic, even though they are in possession of significant amounts of such data.

It is reasonable to expect that differences in antibiotic usage will be found between different types of farming approaches. Factors such as stocking densities (the number of animals per area), access to the outdoors, breeds, stress levels, are all known to have an impact on disease incidence and transmission¹⁴. In the case of organic farming, in addition to certain husbandry requirements, such as lower stocking densities, access to outdoors, later weaning of piglets, etc.

there are also specific rules restricting the use of antibiotics which are likely to have a major impact on overall antibiotic use¹⁵, see Box 2.

Some supermarkets also now have large amounts of information on the antibiotic use of their suppliers and publishing this in as detailed a form as possible would undoubtedly help drive reductions in use. Consumers would have more information about the production of the meat, dairy, farmed fish and eggs they buy, and supermarkets would be able to compare with competitors and learn from best practice, and a YouGov survey carried out in November 2019 for the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics shows that consumers do want this data to be published. The survey found that a large majority of the general public think that supermarkets should publish antibiotic-use data they possess: 87% of 2,090 people surveyed thought that supermarkets should have to publish information they possess on farm antibiotic use, and just 4% thought they shouldn't, which means that 96% people who expressed an opinion thought that supermarkets should have to publish their data¹⁷.

Like farming organisations, some supermarkets also possess data on antibiotic use by farm system, and more should collect and distinguish the data by farm system in this way. Supermarkets which already possess such data should be encouraged or required to publish it in full, in the public interest. Understanding how the different husbandry practices in different farming systems affect disease incidence and antibiotic use can only be achieved with improved data. Unfortunately this understanding is being held back by the refusal to publish readily available data.

Box 2

Restrictions on antibiotic use in organic farming

In British and European organic farming, use of antibiotics is permitted when alternative husbandry measures or treatments are not effective¹⁵. However, no routine use or preventative use of these medicines is allowed. To further protect consumers from any possible residues in food, when antibiotics are used the withdrawal period that must be observed before an animal goes to slaughter or eggs or milk are collected for human consumption is twice the normal withdrawal period for non-organic produce.

In the case of British organic produce certified by the Soil Association, some additional antibiotic standards apply¹⁶. These include a total ban on the use of the last-resort antibiotic colistin, and a restriction on the use of high-priority critically important antibiotics so that these can only be used when no other treatment is likely to be effective.



‘A future world where bugs are all resistant to antibiotics will return us to the dark days of ineffective healthcare and condemn many to early deaths. Animal health and human health must be equally protected to save our antibiotics.’

Prof John Middleton, President of the Faculty of Public Health, 2018

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What we found

Table 1
Summary of supermarket antibiotic-use policies

Supermarket	Policy publicly available	Bans routine use of ABs	HPClAs restricted	Bans Colistin	Monitors use of ABs	Reduction strategy in place	Publishes AB use data	Publishes AB use data by farming
Aldi	Yes	No ¹	Yes/No ²	No	Yes/No ³	Yes	No	No
Asda	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes/No ⁴
Co-op	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes/No ⁵	No
Iceland	No ⁶	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Lidl	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes/No ⁷	No ⁸
M&S	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes/No ⁹	No
Morrisons	Yes	Yes/No ¹⁰	Yes	Yes/No ¹¹	Yes	Yes	No	No
Sainsbury's	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Tesco	Yes	Yes	Yes	No ¹²	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Waitrose	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

¹ Aldi recommends that preventative antibiotic use be avoided for own-label fresh milk, fresh primary pork and chicken products and that strategies be put in place to achieve this, but routine preventative use is not prohibited.

² Aldi only limits use of HPClAs for own-label fresh milk, fresh primary pork and chicken production.

³ Aldi only monitors antibiotic use for own-label fresh milk, fresh primary pork and chicken production.

⁴ Asda antibiotic-use data does distinguish between free range and non-free range eggs, and all-year-round housed beef cattle and mixed grazing and housing cattle.

⁵ Co-op has only published antibiotic-use data for 2017.

⁶ Iceland has told us they are currently developing an antibiotics policy but do not currently have an active policy.

⁷ Lidl has only published data for poultry for 2018. Lidl's 2017 data seems to be just a re-publication of national averages rather than data for its own suppliers.

⁸ Lidl has published data on antibiotic-use in free range poultry, but only for two months which makes it insufficiently meaningful.

⁹ M&S has only published antibiotic-use data for 2016 and 2017.

¹⁰ Morrisons has only banned routine preventative antibiotic use in poultry, including egg layers, but will extend this prohibition to all species in 2020.

¹¹ Morrisons will ban colistin in 2020. Already banned in pork.

¹² Tesco has not banned colistin, but has reported zero use in 2018.

Large differences were found in the publicly available policies in our 2017 assessment, and many of these differences remain in 2019 (see Table 1). Nevertheless some positive progress has been made.

In particular, there has been an overall increase in the number of supermarkets reporting that they have antibiotic-reduction strategies in place, an improvement in antibiotic-use monitoring across the leading supermarkets and some supermarkets have published antibiotic-use data whereas in 2017 none had done so.

Iceland is the only supermarket out of the 10 we contacted that has no publicly available policy. Iceland told us that they are in the process of developing a policy and aim to publish it soon.

Six supermarkets now have bans on their suppliers using antibiotics routinely for disease prevention (Co-op, Lidl, M&S, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose). Five of these six supermarkets already had such a ban in place in 2017, but at the time Lidl had no publicly available policy. Morrisons has a ban in poultry, including egg-laying hens, but will only extend this to other species next year. Aldi has no ban although for certain species it requires that a strategy to be put in place to avoid preventative use. Asda and Iceland have no restrictions on routine antibiotic use other than minimum legal restrictions.

One of the most notable changes since the 2017 assessment is the number of supermarkets which now have active reduction strategies in place. In 2017, many of the supermarkets said they supported a reduction in the use of antibiotics in farming, but Aldi, Asda, Co-op and Lidl did not provide evidence they were actually taking action to achieve reductions in their own supply chains. In 2019, all supermarkets except for Iceland have antibiotic-reduction strategies in place.

Waitrose and M&S are still the only two supermarkets to have banned the use of the last-resort antibiotic colistin from their supply chains. Morrisons has banned the use of colistin in pork production and will fully ban use of the antibiotic in 2020. Tesco reports no current use of colistin across its supply chain, but has not banned its use; and other supermarkets continue to allow the antibiotic to be used under certain circumstances.

Policies to restrict the use of high-priority Critically Important Antibiotics (HPCIAAs) have been reported by all the leading supermarkets in the UK, except for Iceland. In the case of Aldi, these policies do not yet apply to all species. These supermarket policies are likely to have contributed to the reductions in use of these antibiotics which have occurred in British farming in recent years¹.

Apart from Iceland (whose policy is in development), all supermarkets now monitor antibiotic use in their supply chain, although Aldi's monitoring only covers certain species. This is progress from 2017, when the publicly available policies of Asda, Co-op and Lidl did not include antibiotic-use monitoring. Most supermarkets, however, still don't regularly publish their antibiotic-use data. Only six supermarkets (Asda, Co-op, Lidl, M&S, Tesco and Waitrose) have published some data, and this has only been for some species and some years.

Lidl has published antibiotic-use data which it suggests is the data for its suppliers for 2017. However, we note with concern that all of the 2017 antibiotic-use data it has published for beef cows, dairy cows, egg-laying hens, broilers (chickens raised for meat), pigs and turkeys, including the specific use data for "high-priority critically important antibiotics" in these species, is identical to the national antibiotic-use figures published in the government's Veterinary Medicines Directorate¹. If this data has simply been copied from national averages, we must respond that republishing national averages is not the same as publishing data on Lidl's own suppliers. In contrast, the data Lidl has published for antibiotic use in poultry for 2018/2019 is not the same as national averages and does appear to be collected from Lidl suppliers, but Lidl has not published data for this period for any other species.

It is interesting to note that the levels of antibiotic use being reported by the five supermarkets that have published data is nearly always well below the published national averages for those years in pigs, chickens, turkeys and beef cows (see Appendix 3). This suggests that antibiotic use in other supermarkets, or other sectors such as food service, must be far higher, or that the data being published by some of the supermarkets is not as accurate or as comprehensive as it should be.

The supermarket antibiotic-use data in dairy cows is generally much closer to the national figure, although the national figure is only from a survey rather than derived from data collection covering most of the industry as occurs for pigs and poultry.

There is still a near complete lack of supermarket data being published on antibiotic-use by farming system, such as intensive, higher-welfare indoor systems, pasture-fed, free range or organic, even though we think that many supermarkets are almost certainly in possession of at least some of this information. The only supermarkets to have published any system-level data are Asda and Lidl.

Lidl has so far only published two months of data for use in free-range poultry, which is clearly insufficient for drawing conclusions. Nevertheless, it shows that for those two months use in free-range birds was about 45% lower than in intensive production.

A very small Asda survey found a lower level of antibiotic use for cattle raised for beef or dairy with mixed grazing and housing than in cows housed all year round. The survey was too small, however, for drawing conclusions.

On the other hand, Asda has also published data showing that antibiotic use in free-range egg-laying hens is more than twice as high as for egg-laying hens kept in cages.

These Asda findings, however, are in contrast to the usage levels reported by Noble Foods, the UK's largest egg producer. Data from Noble Foods, covering about seven times more birds than Asda's survey, show that antibiotic use in caged birds was about 30% higher than for free-range birds¹⁸.

Noble Foods data show that free-range laying birds can have lower levels of antibiotic use than caged birds. However, a possible explanation for why caged birds may, in some cases, have relatively low levels of antibiotic use is that hens kept in cages are perhaps less in contact with faeces, as the faeces fall through the bottom of the cage. Accidental ingestion of faeces is a major cause of disease in intensive chicken-meat production, and can also occur with egg layers. However, reducing animal welfare by keeping birds in cages and preventing them from expressing natural behaviours such as scratching the ground should not be the answer to lowering antibiotic use. To reduce or avoid infections being acquired from contact with faeces, there are much better-welfare solutions, such as pasture rotation which is required in organic systems and which prevents the build-up of parasites and other infectious organisms.

Much more data from supermarkets on antibiotic use in various systems will help increase understanding of the causes of disease in farming.



5

Next steps

There is progress happening in the UK retail sector and a willingness to continue driving reductions in antibiotic use. Gradual improvements in supermarkets' policies and Red Tractor antibiotics standards are both likely to have contributed to a 50% reduction in UK farm antibiotic use since 2014. A significant amount of routine antibiotic use on UK farms has been phased out over the past few years, although it is disappointing that only six of ten supermarkets have banned routine preventative antibiotic use during this period.

Significant further action is still required from supermarkets. The Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics has produced recommendations for best-practice supermarket antibiotic policies, which are in Appendix 2. Initially policies should be applicable for all fresh and frozen meat and fish, fresh eggs, dairy products and all own-brand products containing animal-derived ingredients, but ultimately they need to be extended to cover all products containing animal-derived ingredients.

Applying antibiotic policies to the entire supply chain, including imported produce, will be particularly important in light of the UK's decision to leave the European Union (EU). Many countries outside of the EU have weaker regulations governing farm antibiotic use, and often have much higher levels of use than in the UK. Supermarkets must avoid subjecting British producers to unfair competition from imports produced to lower standards and need to ensure that all imports meet the same animal-welfare and antibiotic standards required of British produce.

All supermarkets should commit to immediately ending all routine antibiotic use. In future, supermarket policies should be strengthened to make clear that all purely preventative group treatments, which by their very nature tend to be routine, are not permitted. The EU will be banning this form of antibiotic misuse in 2022, and British supermarkets should not be operating to lower standards than minimum EU standards.

To achieve even greater reductions in antibiotic use than have occurred so far, animal health and welfare needs to be prioritised and more emphasis given to farming systems and husbandry practices which minimise animal stress and disease. Supermarkets must therefore publish information they have on antibiotic use by farming system, to help increase understanding of the main health problems that are the root cause of most farm antibiotic use. Transparency is also important for consumers to be provided with honest information about how their food is produced so that they can make informed choices about their purchases.

The use of colistin in British farming is now at very low levels, and we believe there is no benefit to human or animal health from allowing a small number of farms to continue using this last-resort antibiotic. The level of antibiotic resistance on a farm, that would lead to the requirement for a last-resort antibiotic to be used, would indicate more significant problems on that farm that should be addressed. Farm use of this antibiotic has been linked to resistance in human infections and so all supermarkets should unequivocally ban the use of colistin in their supply chains.

Major differences in antibiotic policies remain between the different supermarkets, and Iceland's lack of action on this issue to date is unacceptable and irresponsible.

The recently announced Food Industry Initiative on Antimicrobials (FIIA) could possibly lead to a broader raising of standards across supermarkets, the food-service industry, manufacturers and processors. However, for this to happen, FIIA policies will need to be sufficiently ambitious and transparency on antibiotic use will be very important.

Appendix 1: Supermarket antibiotic policies, accessed during the assessment period, 2019

Aldi – Animal Welfare Policies and Performance, [https://cdn.aldi-digital.co.uk/\\$3MecVZ0AqI\\$NpnmJMIX9IjvqQ.pdf](https://cdn.aldi-digital.co.uk/$3MecVZ0AqI$NpnmJMIX9IjvqQ.pdf)

Asda – Reducing Antibiotics in Food Production, http://s7d2.scene7.com/is/content/asdagroceries/Asda.com/7.%20Sites/Environment/ASDA-Antibiotics-report-2018_V7.pdf

Co-op – Co-op Animal Welfare Standards & Performance & Co-op Antibiotics Policy, https://assets.ctfassets.net/bffxiku554r1/vSmTTROxs7uNGvtKauQBj/c4b9c573798420426038ed74802c5ac5/Co-op_Animal_Welfare_Standards_Performance_and_Co-op_Antibiotic_Policy.pdf

Lidl – Antibiotics <https://corporate.lidl.co.uk/sustainability/animal-welfare/antibiotics>, Antibiotics Stewardship Policy <https://corporate.lidl.co.uk/content/download/13121/fileupload/Lidl%20GB%20Antibiotics%20Stewardship%20Policy%202019.pdf>

M&S – Antimicrobial Usage Policy in M&S Sourced Livestock <https://corporate.marksandspencer.com/documents/plan-a-our-approach/mands-antimicrobial-policy-0517.pdf>

Morrisons – Antibiotic Use <https://www.morrisons-farming.com/how-we-work/antibiotic-use/>

Sainsbury's – Antibiotic Resistance: Keeping Our Animal Healthy <https://www.about.sainsburys.co.uk/~/-/media/Files/S/Sainsburys/Antibiotic-Resistance-Report-2019.pdf>

Tesco – Antibiotics <https://www.tescopl.com/sustainability/downloads/animal-welfare-policy-group/antibiotics/>

Waitrose – Animal Welfare https://www.waitrose.com/home/inspiration/about_waitrose/the_waitrose_way/waitrose_animal_welfarecommitments.html



Appendix 2: Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics recommendations for best-practice

Every supermarket should have a public, up-to-date policy which sets out the minimum standards of responsible antibiotic use that its suppliers and farmers must meet. Initially this should encompass all fresh and frozen meat and fish, fresh eggs, dairy products and all own-brand products containing animal-derived ingredients. The policy should ultimately be extended to cover all products containing animal-derived ingredients.

As part of their policies, supermarkets should:

1. Ban all routine antibiotic use

The routine use of antibiotics for disease prevention is in decline in the UK, but it's likely to be still happening since use in some species in the UK is much higher than in countries that have a ban on routine use. Routine use is often, but not always, preventative. Where animals are kept in conditions which routinely result in disease, antibiotics are also sometimes routinely used for treatment. Supermarkets making this policy commitment will help to accelerate the phasing out of all routine use.

2. Ban all purely preventative antibiotic treatments of groups of animals when no disease has been diagnosed in any of the animals

Purely preventative group treatments account for most routine antibiotic use. These treatments will be banned in the EU in 2022 and British supermarkets should not be operating to lower standards than minimum EU standards. Preventative group treatments are usually given to compensate for low-welfare, cramped conditions where disease outbreaks are common and harder to control. The WHO also advocates ending such treatments to reduce the risk of antibiotic resistance and protect human and animal health¹⁹.

3. Restrict the use of the high-priority critically important antibiotics (modern cephalosporins and fluoroquinolones) so that these antibiotics can only be used where sensitivity shows that other treatments would not be effective, and so that they are never used for prevention or for group treatments.

Increasing resistance in human infections to these antibiotics has been in part due to the use of these medicines in animals. WHO Guidelines also recommend

that these antibiotics should only be used in farming as a last resort.

4. Ban the use of the last-resort antibiotic colistin

Colistin is an antibiotic used in human medicine as a last resort to treat certain life-threatening multi-antibiotic resistant infections. The consequences of resistance to colistin can be fatal. There is strong scientific evidence that some resistance to colistin in human infections is due to the farm use of the antibiotic. In order to protect human health there should be a total end to the use of this antibiotic in farming.

5. Collect and publish data on antibiotic use by suppliers

Supermarkets should be collecting data from their suppliers to ensure that use of antibiotics in their supply chains is consistent with their views on responsible use. Publishing of data generally helps to drive down usage, enables producers and supermarkets to learn from best practice and increases transparency for consumers.

6. Collect and publish data on antibiotic use by farming system, such as intensive, higher-welfare indoors, free-range, pasture-fed and organic

Consumers will have more information about the production of the meat, dairy, farmed fish and eggs they buy. Furthermore, understanding how the different husbandry practices in different farming systems affect disease incidence and antibiotic use can only be achieved with improved data made publicly available.

7. Have an antibiotic-reduction strategy which includes commitments to improve animal husbandry and animal health and welfare

Although large cuts have been made to British farm antibiotic use in recent years, use remains much higher than necessary and much higher than in countries like Norway or Sweden which have higher animal-welfare standards. Supermarkets should support their farmers and suppliers so that improvements to husbandry, which may increase costs in some cases, can be achieved.

Compassion in World Farming's 'How to develop an Antibiotic Stewardship Programme: A guide for corporates' provides further guidance on developing an antibiotics policy.

Appendix 3: Summary of publicly available supermarket antibiotic-use data

Table A1 Publicly available supermarket antibiotic-use data for pigs
(in mg of active ingredient per kg of livestock unit)

	2016	2017	2018
UK national data	183	131	110
Co-op	NA	42	NA
M&S	41	41	NA
Tesco	NA	NA	60
Waitrose	75-100	25-50	25-50

Table A2 Publicly available supermarket antibiotic-use data for chickens
(in mg of active ingredient per kg of livestock unit)

	2016	2017	2018
UK national data	17.1	9.9	12.4
Asda	NA	7.7	7.3
Co-op	NA	12.7	NA
Lidl	NA	NA	8.4
M&S	4	2.5	NA
Tesco	NA	NA	4.9
Waitrose	<5	<5	<5

Table A3 Publicly available supermarket antibiotic-use data for turkey
(in mg of active ingredient per kg of livestock unit)

	2016	2017	2018
UK national data	86.4	45.1	46.7
Asda	NA	20	35
Co-op	NA	9	NA
Tesco	NA	NA	13.6
Waitrose	15-20	15-20	20-25

Table A4 Publicly available supermarket antibiotic-use data for dairy cows (in mg of active ingredient per kg of livestock unit)

	2016	2017	2018
UK national data	26	16	17
Asda	NA	20	22.9
Co-op	NA	13.2	NA
M&S	15	9	NA
Waitrose	20-25	20-25	15-20

Table A5 Publicly available supermarket antibiotic-use data for beef cows (in mg of active ingredient per kg of livestock unit)

	2016	2017	2018
UK national data	NA	19	21
Asda	NA	7-9	1.5
Co-op	NA	2.8	NA
Waitrose	<5	<5	<5



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“WHO strongly recommends an overall reduction in the use of all classes of medically important antibiotics in food-producing animals, including complete restriction of these antibiotics for growth promotion and disease prevention without diagnosis. Healthy animals should only receive antibiotics to prevent disease if it has been diagnosed in other animals in the same flock, herd, or fish population.”

World Health Organization, 2017



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The Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics is an alliance of health, medical, environmental and animal welfare groups working to stop the over-use of antibiotics in animal farming. It was founded by the Soil Association, Compassion in World Farming International and Sustain in 2009. Its vision is a world in which human and animal health and well-being are protected by food and farming systems that do not rely routinely on antibiotics and related drugs.

COMPASSION
in world farming 

sustain
the alliance for better food and farming

Soil
Association 