

# Have you ever heard someone say “our food is pumped up with hormones and antibiotics”?

Certainly research has shown some consumers hold this view. But is it true? The questions and answers below lay out the real position over the use of such substances.

## Q 1 Do British farmers use hormones to boost their animals' growth?

A No, hormonal growth promoters have been banned since 1988 in the UK and the rest of the European Union.

However, some hormones have limited uses as medicines to treat sick cattle or to aid fertility in cattle, pigs and sheep. They must only be prescribed under the strict control of a veterinarian.

## Q 2 What about antibiotics?

A No, at one time very small doses of some antibiotics were allowed to be added to feed because they improved the growth rates of some farm animals. But the EU stopped the practice on 1 January 2006.

Vets can prescribe some antibiotics to treat disease in farm animals. The use of antibiotics as medicines is an important tool in maintaining good animal health and welfare, as are sound farm management and animal husbandry systems.

## Q 3 What checks are there?

A The Government's Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) tests animals on farms and at slaughterhouses to check that only authorised medicines are being used both correctly and safely. This work is overseen by the independent Veterinary Residues Committee (see over). The VMD also monitors sales of veterinary antibiotics.

## Q 4 What have they found?

A British farmers use medicines responsibly. The results of testing over a number of years indicate that home-produced animals are very unlikely to have been treated with illegal growth promoters. Also, most samples tested contain no detectable residues of antibiotics. In the few cases where residues above the agreed limits are detected, follow-up action is taken.

## Q 5 What about imported meat?

A Some meat imported into the UK comes from other parts of the EU and is subject to similar controls and testing regimes as home-produced meat before it is exported. The VMD and Port Health Authorities have also tested meat imported from outside the EU. These imports must originate from establishments and countries that meet EU requirements. The testing has shown no evidence of treatment with illegal hormonal growth promoters. The Veterinary Residues Committee would, however, like to see more testing of imported foods.

## Q 6 Are the results published?

A Yes. The independent Veterinary Residues Committee publish the results in the 'Reports' section of its website at: [www.vet-residues-committee.gov.uk](http://www.vet-residues-committee.gov.uk).

VMD publishes sales figures for veterinary antibiotics annually. The reports are on the VMD website ([www.vmd.gov.uk](http://www.vmd.gov.uk)) under the 'Publications' and 'Antibiotic Related' tabs.



# There is Independent Scrutiny of Veterinary Medicines Use and Residues Monitoring in the UK

The Veterinary Residues Committee is an independent advisory committee that oversees the Government's monitoring of foods for residues of veterinary medicines.

## Q 1 Who are the committee?

The Committee members have a wide range of expertise, for example: in farming, consumer issues, food safety, analytical chemistry and use of veterinary medicines.

## Q 2 What is the committee's remit?

The Committee ensures that there is independent oversight of the UK's system of surveillance for residues of veterinary medicines. The Committee can advise on and question the choices that are made and also on the actions that need to be taken where any residues are found.

## Q 3 Where can I find out about its work?

The Committee has its own website: [www.vet-residues-committee.gov.uk](http://www.vet-residues-committee.gov.uk). It publishes the papers considered by the committee and much other information.

The results of testing both home-produced and imported foods can be found under the 'Meeting Papers' and 'Reports' sections of the website.

## Q 4 Can I contribute?

The VRC's website has contact details. You can write to us, or send us an e-mail. Also, each year, the Committee holds an Open Meeting, usually around October. You could apply for tickets through the website. You will be very welcome.

## Q 5 Why do farmers use medicines?

Just like us and indeed our pets, farm animals can get ill and need medicines. So medicines used responsibly are essential for the health and welfare of farm animals.

## Q 6 What is the role of Farm Assurance Schemes?

Many British farmers are members of assurance schemes, such as 'Assured British Meat'. For example, if you see the Red Tractor Logo on food packaging, it means that the producer is a member of a recognised assurance scheme. It also means the product was produced, processed and packed in the UK.

Red Tractor assurance schemes carry out regular independent audits. These ensure members meet industry standards for animal health, welfare and food safety. This includes using medicines responsibly and recording their use correctly, minimising the risk of unacceptable residues being present when we buy home-produced meat.

## Q 7 Is our food safe?

The results of the testing that the VRC oversees demonstrate that British farmers use medicines responsibly. The Committee sees very few residues of any health concern in British foods. It recommends follow-up action if any unacceptable residues are found. The VRC has reported its concerns about specific foods from particular countries outside of the EU. The Committee would like to be able to do more testing of imports and be able to give consumers more reassurance.

