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Woolworths Antimicrobial Stewardship Background

At Woolworths, we support and encourage industry best practice, guidelines and initiatives around antimicrobial stewardship within our supply chains. Responsible antimicrobial usage plays a vital role in maintaining good animal health and welfare when required, in conjunction with a clearly defined and informed veterinary health strategy. We expect and encourage our suppliers to use antimicrobials appropriately. We recognise the importance of antimicrobials in human and animal medicine and the public health risk of antimicrobial resistance. We encourage our producers to uphold preventative health management, hygiene, husbandry and biosecurity and to minimise the need to use antimicrobials, unless the health and welfare of an animal is compromised. Veterinary medicines, including antimicrobials must only be used under veterinary guidance. Each farm animal sector has its own [Antimicrobial Stewardship programme](#), which Woolworths supports.

Antimicrobials (including antibiotics) are used within animal production to help treat, control and prevent bacterial infections, maintaining animal health and welfare. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) occurs when microbes (e.g. bacteria) develop the ability to survive the use of antimicrobial agents. AMR is a globally significant challenge to public health. The responsible use of antimicrobials forms the basis of Antimicrobial Stewardship.

(Coombe 2021, page 7)



Figure 1. The 5R framework for good antimicrobial stewardship.

Woolworths accepts the globally recognised [5Rs approach](#) to antimicrobial stewardship and encourages suppliers to use the same framework of responsibility, reduction, refinement, replacement and review in the use of antimicrobials. This document outlines the antimicrobial use requirements for all farmed animals supplied into Woolworths Australian Supermarkets including animal products that will be used in our Own Brand products. These include fresh beef, lamb, pork, poultry (chicken, turkey and eggs), milk and farmed finfish.

Woolworths Australia Antimicrobial Stewardship Policy

We expect suppliers to demonstrate adherence to the following principles:

Responsibility

Woolworths suppliers must use antimicrobials appropriately. This means we expect our suppliers to follow industry best practice, guidelines and initiatives around antimicrobial stewardship.

- Suppliers and producers are required to adopt antimicrobial stewardship practices and have herd/flock health plans in place. A veterinarian must provide guidance on all medical treatments.
- All antimicrobials used within the livestock sectors in Australia must be approved by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) for use in the intended species.

Reduce

Woolworths Suppliers must seek to reduce where possible the use of antimicrobials, whilst preserving animal health and welfare:

- Antimicrobials will only be used as a treatment where no other viable treatment is available and to not do so would compromise the health and welfare of the animal. Where prescribed for animal health, use should be for the shortest appropriate period.
- We prohibit the use of all antimicrobials for growth promotion and encourage our suppliers to eliminate routine prophylactic treatments of antimicrobials.
- Use of antimicrobials should be restricted to use in species where they are approved for use, in animals with diseases that are not responsive to other treatments, and when supported by testing from an accredited diagnostic laboratory.
- Working with veterinarians, suppliers must restrict the use of antimicrobials, [working to either the Australian Strategic and Technical Advisory Group](#) on antimicrobial resistance (ASTAG) deemed to be of high importance [2], and / or those deemed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) critically important.

Refine

Woolworths seeks to refine the use of antimicrobial agents in its supply chains by ensuring the appropriate use in animals that have a clinical indication for treatment:

- Antimicrobial administration to animals on our supplying farms for treatment or control of disease, is to be done in compliance with veterinary prescription and instructions based on diagnostic testing.

Replace

Woolworths works with and supports industry to reduce the overall need to use antimicrobials:

- Conducting regular flock and herd health evaluations complemented with relevant laboratory diagnostics and analyses of production and health data to support the identification and control of disease(s) on farm.
- Utilising the information gathered and using evidence-based alternatives where appropriate, antimicrobials are replaced. These alternatives can include vaccination, supplements and probiotics, improved husbandry and management practices, and changes in genetics.

Review

Woolworths understands the importance of data and evidence-driven approaches to antimicrobial stewardship:

- We encourage suppliers to collect, monitor and review the appropriateness of their antimicrobial use in order to inform decisions in their future antimicrobial stewardship planning. We aim to set a precedent by putting in place frameworks to support data collection processes to support this decision making.

Glossary of terms

Antibiotics are naturally occurring, semi-synthetic or synthetic substances that kill or inhibit the growth of bacteria. Antibiotics are a specific subset of antimicrobials.

Antibiotic growth promotion is the continuous use of antibiotics in-feed, often at sub-therapeutic dose rates, to increase growth rates and feed efficiency in food-producing animals.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the ability of microbes to grow or survive in the presence of an antimicrobial agent. The effect of this phenomenon is to make an antimicrobial ineffective at treating infection with these microbes in an individual (animal, human or plant).

ASTAG ratings: The ranking of antimicrobials based on their importance to human and animal health by the Australian Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (ASTAG), most recently in 2018.

Critically-important antimicrobials: The World Health Organisation (WHO)'s latest guidelines (2019) on classification of the critically-important antimicrobials for human health. The highest priority critically-important antimicrobials (HP-CIAs) defined in this list of relevance to the food animal sector. Colistin is not registered for use in any species of animal in Australia.

Metaphylaxis (or metaphylactic treatment) is the treatment of a group of animals in which one or more of the animals, or previously 'in-contact' animals, are showing clinical signs of a disease.

Prophylaxis (or prophylactic treatment) is the treatment of a healthy animal or group of animals to prevent infection, before an expected disease challenge. Prophylactic antibiotic use is commonly administered in feed or water for food animals.

Treatment or therapy is the administration of a medicine to an individual animal, or a group of animals, showing clinical signs of a disease.

Withholding period is the time that must elapse between the last administration of a veterinary medicine to an animal and the slaughter or production of food from that animal, to ensure that the food does not contain levels of the medicine that exceed the maximum residue limit.

References

1. Coombe, J (2021) Figure 1. 'The 5R framework for good antimicrobial stewardship', *Antimicrobial Stewardship in Australian Livestock Industries*, 2nd ed, July 2023
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2. Australian Government (2018) Importance Ratings and Summary of Antibacterial Uses in Human and Animal Health in Australia. Retrieved from:
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