

Be sure to use the right drug for the right bug

The misuse of antimicrobials and unnecessary treatment has led to calls from members of both the medical and veterinary professions to ban the use of certain antimicrobials in farm animals.

To avoid this situation becoming reality, the British Veterinary Association (BVA) has produced guidance on the responsible use of antimicrobials. This recommends that livestock producers and veterinarians should work together to avoid, where possible, the need to use antimicrobials, that the 'inappropriate' use of antimicrobials should be avoided and that

the prophylactic use of antimicrobials should be minimised.

Antimicrobials work by killing bacteria, or suppressing their growth or multiplication. But bacteria are constantly evolving so the more exposure they have to antimicrobials, particularly at low levels over long periods of time, the more likely they are to develop resistance. "So they should only be used when necessary, at appropriate dose rates, frequencies and durations," stresses veterinarian Keith Cutler, of the Salisbury-based Endell Veterinary Group.

The BVA also recommends that deviation

from standard treatments should be recorded and justified, that sensitivities should be monitored and that suspected treatment failures should be reported to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD).

"In short, this says that the blanket in-feed or in-milk medication of groups of calves with an antimicrobial is bad practice," says Dr Cutler.

"Treatment for specific problems, such as calf pneumonia, may be necessary in certain situations, but should not be relied on. Instead, good husbandry should be employed to prevent disease," Dr Cutler stresses.