Cross-contamination of antimicrobial substances in non-target feed

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Regulation 2024/1229 establishing specific maximum levels of cross-contamination of antimicrobial active substances in non-target feed and methods of analysis for these substances in feed

What is changing and why?

The European Commission has set levels of cross-contamination of animal feed with antimicrobial substances that are considered to be acceptable. In the EU, feeding animals with antimicrobials as a growth promoter and to increase yield is prohibited. It is recognised that these practices can lead to antimicrobial resistance.

Antimicrobials can, however, be included in medicated feed when needed. Medicated feed is a mixture of feed and veterinary medicines commonly used to treat animals. Where medicated feed is manufactured or processed in the same facilities as non-medicated feed (in this context called “non-target feed”), there is risk of cross-contamination. In these facilities it is also common practice to remove traces of the medicated feed by flushing the equipment with non-medicated feed, which is then used as a non-target feed (to avoid feed waste).

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA 2021) considers a maximum level of cross-contamination at 1% of the concentration of the active substance present in the medicated feed to be feasible using good practice. At that level there is minimal risk of antimicrobial resistance, or impact on growth promotion or yield.

There are two exceptions where the maximum level of cross-contamination must be stricter:

- Medicated feed intended for fish often contains much higher doses of antimicrobials than medicated feed intended for other food-producing animals. Stricter rules must therefore apply where there is a risk of cross-contamination from medicated feed intended for fish.
- Animals producing milk or eggs, and animals close to the date of slaughter, must not be fed with feed that is contaminated with medicated feed.

In both cases, stricter maximum levels of cross-contamination in non-target feed are set at the limit of quantification (LOQ, the lowest concentration of a substance that can be measured with certainty using standard tests).

Actions

Manufacturers, and processing, storage, and transport facilities handling feed for export to the EU should assess and minimise risks of cross-contamination with antimicrobial active substances in non-target feed, if they also handle medicated feed in the same facilities. Cross-contamination should be avoided or kept as low as possible by applying good practices to prevent antimicrobial resistance.

Exporting countries are recommended to use the methods of analysis for antimicrobial active substances referred to in the Annex to this Regulation. Alternative analytical methods may be used if they are validated in accordance with internationally accepted scientific protocols, and only if the LOQ is the same as, or lower than, that referred to in the Annex.

It is also recommended to use official, accredited laboratories with proven competence for such analysis.

Timeline

Applies from **20 May 2024**.

For more information see the full record on the AGRINFO website – where you can also view the latest AGRINFO Update newsletters and search the database.