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## Germany

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### Germany Plans to Reduce Farm use of Antibiotics

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Livestock and Products

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**Report Highlights:**

On September 19, 2012, the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection (BMELF) announced plans to reduce the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry. The plan provides for better monitoring of the use of antibiotics in cattle, pigs, chickens and turkeys and the establishment of a national database. Before the policies can come into effect, an amendment to the Medicines Act must be passed by both the Bundestag and the Federal Council, which is likely to occur in the spring of 2013.

## The Amendment

The title of the September 19 press release on the proposed legislation is “tighter controls, more stringent requirements, more transparency.” With the amendment, the use of antibiotics in cattle, pigs, chickens and turkeys shall be only used if the medical treatment is necessary. The draft proscribes tough punishment for violations and Germany’s 16 federal states will be responsible for heightened monitoring, compliance and enforcement.

With the amendment of the Medicines Act, the exchange of information among regulatory authorities is to also be improved and a key element of the amendment is the establishment of a national database. Livestock farms will be obliged to report to authorities every three months on how often they have administered antibiotics. The Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) will draw on this information to calculate a national average every six months, which will be published.

Farmers, with antibiotics use above average, have to check in with their veterinarians to determine why so many antibiotics were administered and to plan for reductions. In cases of serious violations, farmers have to present a plan to veterinary authorities for review. The authorities may require further changes or actions to reduce the use of antibiotics.

The amendment also impedes the use of certain antibiotics that are important in human medicine.

## Background

According to the Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) a total of 1,734 tons of antibiotics in 2011 were sold by pharmaceutical companies and wholesalers to veterinarians in Germany. The numbers has more than doubled compared to 2005, in part due to large increases in pork production.

Politicians have been under pressure for some time to reduce the use of antibiotics in animal production, with NGOs playing a large role. For example, according to BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) antibiotics are used over 40 times more often in animal production as in German hospitals and seven times more than in total human medicine.

## Reactions

Ilse Aigner, Federal Minister of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection, said that the use of antibiotics could be reduced significantly within a few years if federal and state governments would cooperate better. She added that the amendment would target crucial points and "more importantly, those companies where it is necessary."

According to Germany's Green party, the proposed amendment will not achieve its goal. "There remain serious flaws in the system," said party leader and former agricultural minister Renate Künast. "It's still not designed to treat the individual animal, but the treatment of the whole herd may continue". Moreover, there are no specific guidelines on how much the use of antibiotics should drop. Künast urged that "the reduction target should be zero".

According to Franz-Josef Holzenkamp, agricultural policy spokesperson of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, the practicability of the antibiotics minimization concept must be proven. The German Farmers Union (DBV) also feels the need to continue to strengthen the responsible use of antibiotics in livestock production by veterinarians and farmers by the amendment. However, DBV does not believe that only farmers should be expected to meet the amendment's bureaucratic requirements.

## Comment

The timing for an amendment to the Medicines Act makes sense for a number of reasons. In the spring of this year, a study about the use of antibiotics in chicken production was published and led to a public outcry. The study showed that over 90 % of the chickens tested in the state of North Rhine Westphalia were treated with antibiotics. The amendment is also being tabled in the context of the European Council's call for policies that slow the onset of antibiotic resistance in human and veterinary medicine. Finally, earlier this year, the EU urged Germany to investigate illegal antibiotics use on farms.

One aspect of on farm antibiotic use that is not addressed in the amendment is the practice of veterinarians selling antibiotics that they themselves prescribe. This practice has been attacked by Green politicians. More generally, the German Green party recently announced that agriculture, and animal welfare in particular, will play a major role in their coming election campaigns at the federal and state levels.