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Current use of contentious inputs in European organic animal production

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Contentious inputs are used by organic farmers to maintain production sustainability and high standards in animal health and welfare. Their implementation has detrimental impact on the environment and present a risk for the development of the organic sector. Information regarding the application of contentious inputs is not available at the European scale and it is a prerequisite to devise and implement roadmaps to phase them out. This work aimed to determine the extent to which antibiotics, anthelmintics and synthetic vitamins are currently used in organic livestock and to highlight differences in their controlled use. A multi-dimensional approach, incorporating: (1) literature reviews; (2) Europe-wide surveys or interviews of organic experts; (3) analysis of publicly available research data; and (4) national and international authorities (veterinary and agricultural organisations) was followed to quantify the current use and need of contentious inputs in European organic animal production. Overall, there was considerable variation in the use of anthelmintics and antibiotics reflecting country-specific differences in the level of pathogen threat and control. Estimates suggest that overall anthelmintic treatments do not exceed one treatment per animal per year in organic farms, although exceptions were noted. Extrapolated calculations indicate that on average 0.7 antibiotic treatments per animal per year are input in organic livestock systems. Dosages of synthetic vitamins are highly standardized, and decisions are made in the premix producing industry rather than on the farms. With few exceptions there are no differences between conventional and organic practice regarding dosage. Research-based background for organic-specific recommendations is therefore needed. The results provide the first benchmark on patterns of contentious input uses in organic livestock farming across Europe. Funded by EU H2020 No 773431 – RELACS.