



**Humane
World for
Animals**

Formerly called Humane Society
International

Tackling antibiotic resistance through better chicken welfare

The intertwined relationship between antibiotics, public health and chicken production has far-reaching implications for both animal welfare and human health.

Antibiotics have been widely used in chicken production to enhance growth and prevent diseases, yet their misuse and overuse has contributed to antibiotic-resistant bacteria, impacting animals and humans alike. The transmission of antibiotic-resistant bacteria from animals to humans raises concerns about the emergence of difficult-to-treat infections, potentially resulting in increased mortality rates.¹ Therefore, Humane World for Animals urges the chicken industry to adopt higher welfare breeds with better natural immunity and disease resistance to reduce reliance on antibiotics.

European Chicken Commitment complements EU legislation on antibiotic use and chicken welfare

In response to human food safety concerns, since January 2022, EU legislation has prohibited the routine use of antibiotics in animal farming, including preventative (prophylactic) group treatments.^{2,3} The Feed Additives Regulation, which came into effect in January 2006, bans the use of antibiotics for growth promotion, allowing their use only for medicinal purposes under veterinary supervision.⁴

Conventional chickens kept for meat production have been bred to grow so quickly that their health is compromised. The rapid body weight gain causes unintended side effects such as greater susceptibility to bacterial and parasitic infections.^{5,6,7,8,9,10} Conversely, slower-growing chickens have better immunity,^{11,12} are more robust and require fewer antibiotics.^{13,14,15} Combined with lower stocking densities, these breeds help reduce the need for antibiotics and help mitigate the development of antibiotic-resistant pathogens.

The European Chicken Commitment (ECC) is a set of science-based welfare criteria agreed by animal welfare organizations worldwide to improve the lives of chickens raised for meat across Europe. The ECC sets out minimum standards for producers and businesses that produce or sell chicken meat, aiming to address the most urgent welfare issues in chicken production. The ECC requires the use of slower growing chicken breeds. Humane World urges the broiler chicken industry to adopt the ECC criteria.

4.95 million

deaths per year are associated with antimicrobial resistance (AMR) globally.¹⁶ AMR is responsible for more than 35,000 deaths every year in the EU.¹⁷

EU targets

a 50% reduction of overall sales of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture by 2030 in the EU. In 2023, EU has achieved approximately half of the 50% reduction target.¹⁸

EU

EU countries report on the ratio of antibiotics sales to biomass of farmed animals (in mg/kg). . Cyprus, Italy and Spain have the highest usage; Sweden, Finland and Luxembourg have the lowest usage.¹⁹

"The science is clear: chickens raised for meat suffer immensely under conventional production methods. The ECC criteria directly address the most pressing welfare issues and will meaningfully improve the health of millions of animals in Europe."

— Dr. Sara Shields, Director, Farm Animal Welfare Science, Humane World for Animals

Chickens raised conventionally are bred for extremely rapid weight gain.²⁰



The Pecking Order

Since 2023, Humane World for Animals has been publishing The Pecking Order reports, evaluating the chicken welfare policies and progress of major fast-food brands in Poland and Romania. The report highlights an urgent need for Poland's and Romania's fast-food industry to accelerate its efforts to adopt higher welfare standards for chickens raised for meat—especially given growing consumer demand for more humane food production. Additionally, the report outlines actionable steps for the industry, lawmakers and consumers to drive meaningful change.

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