

2004 commentary on non-compliant results

Cases are omitted where legal action is being taken or is pending.

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Statutory surveillance scheme and consequential additional testing

Banned medicines and growth promoters

1. Nitrofurans in chickens

The Aminooxazolidone (AOZ) metabolite of furazolidone, a nitrofuran antibiotic that was banned with effect from 1997 for use in food-producing animals, was found in four chickens sampled at the abattoir. After the first result, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) Residues Action Group (RAG) scheduled additional testing and an investigation. One result exceeded the Minimum Required Performance Limit (MRPL) action level (see notes below) prompting a European Union (EU) Rapid Alert notification and the Food Safety Agency (FSA) to programme additional product sampling on a positive-release basis. Six out of a further 178 samples were found to contain AOZ. All of these ten samples were from one company that were found to originate from some of its older poultry houses. VSD of AFBI Stormont sampled at the farms of origin and relevant feed mills, and found furazolidone-containing sediments at the bottom of these farms' older-style water tanks. It is thought that the sediment was inadvertently stirred up during a recent change in the tank cleaning procedure. (Before it was banned, this drug would have been administered via the drinking water). The company programmed the replacement of the older, potentially contaminated tanks; results for November and December samples were compliant and were allowed into the food chain.

2. Phenylbutazone in horses

This anti-inflammatory drug is licensed to treat horses, but not for use in food-producing animals. It was found above the action level in serum samples from two horses consigned for slaughter. RAG has programmed additional sampling on a positive release basis.

3. Steroid hormone in cattle

A serum level of the female hormone progesterone exceeding the action level was confirmed in a steer in excellent bodily condition, prompting an on-farm investigation and sampling of additional animals. Results were negative.

4. Other hormones identified in the steroid screen

The male hormone alpha-nortestosterone was found in two female cattle from two farms above the action level agreed with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). (It was also found below this level in one sheep, necessitating no further action). Another suspicious hormone, conjugated alpha-boldenone was found in one of these cattle; samples from other animals at this farm were negative.

Veterinary medicines

1. **Nicarbazin in chickens**

Levels of this commonly-used antiprotozoal medicine above the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives' advisory Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) were found in chickens from two sites, producing for two different poultry integrators. Both sites operated a twin-bin feeding system (whereby two bins feed each shed to help separate the different diets fed during the lifetime of each flock). However, it is possible that on these occasions, the unmedicated pre-slaughter diet was delivered onto leftover medicated diet within a bin, with the potential for mixing. The feed mill has issued bin management advice to sites.

Additional sampling of chickens for nicarbazin residues was undertaken in 2004 in Northern Ireland (essentially, the follow-up samples taken for nitrofurans testing were tested also for nicarbazin). Eight out of 178 samples from several poultry companies were above the advisory MRL for nicarbazin. Although the incidence and levels continue to fall, cross contamination between medicated and unmedicated diets at feed mills, on delivery lorries and at farms remains an issue within the poultry industry.

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Meat Inspection Scheme

The carcass is detained at sampling, and discarded if a non-compliant result is obtained

Banned medicines and growth promoters

1. **Clenbuterol in cattle**

This banned synthetic growth promoter was found in the retina of one animal at the abattoir, but no evidence of administration was found at the farm and samples from other animals proved negative. The animal concerned had been on the farm less than a year, (the drug's duration in the retina); samples were animals at the previous holding were also sampled. These were also negative.

Veterinary medicines

1. **Oxytetracycline in cattle**

Levels above the MRL were found in 8 carcasses from different producers at the abattoir, and were investigated on-farm. Four had been slaughtered as casualties (all casualty carcasses are sampled at the abattoir), and a further two were probably consigned for slaughter by mistake during the drug's withdrawal period. At least one producer was cautioned for not keeping the mandatory register of medicines administration.

2. **Other antibiotics in cattle**

In a further four cattle carcasses from different producers, levels above the MRL were found for amoxicillin, chlortetracycline, sulphamethazine and tilmicosin respectively. The follow-up farm visits revealed that one animal had been slaughtered as a casualty, two were apparently consigned in error during the drugs' withdrawal period, and there was no evidence or record of chlortetracycline administration.

Two of the cases exemplify the need to observe each medicine's withdrawal time prior to slaughter (including keeping and using the on-farm medicines register). The sulphamethazine had been administered by the farmer's veterinary surgeon and neither were aware that the drug's manufacturer had recently extended its withdrawal time and changed the dosing regimen, probably because this manufacturer no longer lists its products in the National Office of Animal Health's annual compendium of data sheets. The incident prompted an advisory letter to NI Veterinary Today and the Veterinary Record. At 60 days, the withdrawal time for tilmicosin in cattle is at least double that of most other antibiotics.

3. **Ivermectin in cattle**

Three carcasses were found to contain the anthelmintic drug ivermectin. The follow-up visit revealed incomplete medicines records, and that the animals had been treated with an ivermectin-containing anthelmintic and inadvertently consigned for slaughter within the long withdrawal period for this preparation. Of note is that the remaining animals within the treated group on farm would not be able to complete this period before reaching 30 months' age. At this age, under the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy restriction they would no longer be eligible for slaughter for human consumption.

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Pigs Testing Scheme

Phase 1 Sampling

The producer is allocated to intensified, Phase 2 sampling if a non-compliant result is obtained.

Banned medicines

1. Chloramphenicol

Following the finding of illicit chloramphenicol on the market and an illegal factory containing unlicensed dimetridazole-containing preparations, the RAG agreed to test an entire round of Phase 1 pigs for these antibiotics. One pig out of 178 tested contained chloramphenicol. No dimetridazole was found.

Veterinary Medicines

1. Chlortetracycline

This antibiotic was found above the MRL in pig kidneys from six producers. Follow-up visits revealed that at four of the farms, medicated feed intended for other pigs (e.g. weaners and sows) might have been fed in error to fattening pigs prior to slaughter. In another case the medicated premix had been fed to the pigs on top of the rest of the feed, rather than being milled into the feed as per the manufacturer's instruction. A letter was sent reminding that top-dressing feed with premix is illegal. At another site the medicated premix had been milled into the feed on-farm, a procedure that the site was not licensed to do. It is noteworthy that, although the administration of other medicines had been recorded properly in the farm medicines records, at least four of these farms had not recorded administration of chlortetracycline.

Phase 2 Sampling

Carcases from subsequent consignments are detained at sampling and discarded if a non-compliant result is found. Phase 2 sampling is continued until 3 successive sets of samples are found to be compliant.

Phase 2 samples from the above producers, and from four other producers with non-compliant Phase 1 results from the previous year were negative. These producers were returned to Phase 1 sampling.

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