



**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE CARICOM COMPETITION COMMISSION
AND THE CARIBBEAN AGRICULTURAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY
AGENCY FOR WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY 2016:**

ANTIBIOTICS RESISTANCE!

For WCRD 2016, the international consumer protection community is once again tackling the issue of consumer health and diets. The focus in 2015, was on encouraging consumers to make smarter decisions on the foods they eat, while calling on food producers to reduce the level of salt, sugar and fat found in processed foods. The emphasis this year is shining a light on the overuse of antibiotics given to animals that are later served as meat in the food industry, hence the theme “antibiotics resistance”. The overuse of antibiotics in livestock is a growing concern largely because it allows resistant bacteria and resistance genes to spread from these animals to humans through the food-chain¹. As a result, human infections with antibiotic resistant bacteria can be difficult or impossible to cure, and may lead to death² in some instances. Moreover, because livestock and foods of animal origin are traded worldwide, this could contribute to antibiotic resistance in countries which are far removed from where the problem originates³.

The need to act now in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is therefore imperative, given the fact that as net food importing countries the

¹ See WHO (2001). “A growing body of evidence establishes a link between the use of antimicrobials in food-producing animals and the emergence of resistance among common pathogens.”

² According to the World Health Organisation’s Regional Office for Europe (2011), approximately 25 000 people in the European Union die each year from infections caused by antibiotic resistant bacteria. Additionally, according to a report issued by the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is estimated that 23,000 people die each year as a result of antibiotic resistance.

³The problem of antimicrobial resistance knows no boundaries. Countries that import high volumes of meat are at higher risks of importing meats treated with antibiotics from other countries. This is particularly when the importing country lacks the facilities to test the imported meats.

Member States of CARICOM are certainly not immune to this new global threat. In 2013 alone, the region imported approximately USD19.8 billion in meats and edible offal from extra-regional partners⁴. Additionally, many CARICOM countries are home to several international fast food restaurants such as McDonalds, Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), which may import meats and meat products consumed in large quantities by nationals. Consequently, a careful approach must be taken and strategies developed and implemented to protect CARICOM consumers from antibiotic resistant foods and the dangers associated with them.

In light of this, the CARICOM Competition Commission (CCC) and the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) believe that holistic, inter-sectoral and multifaceted approaches must be developed both at the national and regional levels in CARICOM. This integrated approach would facilitate the effective coordination of resources and actions needed to control the importation, sale/distribution, and most importantly the use of antimicrobials in order to deal with this critical issue. It is also the view of the CCC that national consumer protection agencies (NCPAs) within the region have a significant role to play in national strategies to curb antibiotic resistance caused in this manner. NCPAs are designed to protect the rights of consumers as well as to ensure the availability of accurate information about products in the marketplace. As such, NCPAs are ideally equipped to collaborate with other national stakeholders and agencies to raise public awareness of antibiotic resistance, and to prevent its development and spread in the food-chain.

At the regional level, CARICOM has identified antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as an important public and agricultural health issue. Accordingly, an AMR workshop was held in Paramaribo, Suriname in October 2014 as part of the activities to commemorate Caribbean Week of Agriculture. At that workshop, the Chair, then Minister of Agriculture, Guyana, Dr Leslie Ramsammy, opposed the widespread use of antibiotics in agriculture, saying this has serious implications for human health.

In January 2015, another workshop was held in Trinidad and Tobago organized by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA). The objectives of this workshop were to heighten awareness among senior policy makers and public and private sector officials on the issue of AMR and to chart the way forward on the role of governmental organizations and the private sector in monitoring AMR.

An outcome of the 2015 workshop was agreement on the need to control the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry and in human health,

⁴The estimate on the value of regional meat imports from extra-regional sources was obtained from the CARICOM Online Statistical Database.

through an integrated AMR Surveillance System at the national level and to collect relevant data that will assist regional institutions in making informed decisions. Consequently, CAHFSA is in the process of putting a system in place to collect data on the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry in Member States, and to establish electronic data bases nationally and regionally to process this data, to assist the region in making informed decisions.

Additionally, the workshop agreed on the need to adopt and implement international standards to monitor AMR and the usage of antimicrobial agents. These standards have already been developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) and are presently being examined by CAHFSA with a view to recommending their adoption as regional standards.

It is important to note that several institutions of the CARICOM Community have vital roles to play in tackling this very serious issue. As such, an integrated strategy needs to be developed for regional institutions responsible for protecting consumer welfare, whether directly or indirectly. In this regard, the CCC intends to collaborate with these agencies to develop a communications strategy to educate CARICOM consumers, and to ensure that mechanisms are in place to carefully monitor the importation of meats from extra-regional trading partners.

For more information about the work of the CCC in the area of consumer protection, please email admin@ccc.sr or view the website at www.caricomcompetitioncommission.com

For more information about the work of the CAHFSA, please email info@cahfsa.org or view the website at <http://cahfsa.org>