



Driving home from late night calls is often when farm animal vets have time to think clearly. Last night I was reflecting on the new policy from the Department of Agriculture on Critically Important Antibiotics (CIAs) when I remembered my first interaction with a particular client.

Critically Important Antibiotics are those designated as critically important to human health. Antimicrobial resistance is predicted to surpass cancer as a cause of death in humans by 2050. Steps are therefore being taken to reduce and limit the use of these CIAs to preserve their effectiveness for human patients. The CIAs include macrolides, fluoroquinolones and 3rd and 4th generation cephalosporins. These categories contain many antibiotics frequently used on Irish farms such as Tylan, Zuprevo, Excenel, Cobactan, and Marbocyl. The Department's new policy recommends that these antibiotics should not be used as a first line treatment and in most cases only following sensitivity testing. This policy is a recommendation at present, but recommendations become regulations over time.

Six years ago I got a call from a farmer wishing to move all his work over to my practice. Such phone calls both boost your ego and set off alarm bells in equal measure! I arranged a meeting to discuss the proposal. The farmer had a significant enterprise, good facilities and assured me of prompt payment. I enquired what level of clinical work he normally had and was told "I don't need many calls – I can cure most things myself". We did his herd test and a few clinical calls the first year. Over time the clinical calls increased and we looked at some herd health issues on the farm – ventilation, parasites, nutrition, and respiratory disease outbreaks. The farmer made some minor changes to buildings and biosecurity as well as commencing specified vaccination programmes to reduce disease outbreaks. Results were relatively good and everyone was happy despite the fact that his veterinary spend was rising. The farmer was settling the balance on his account recently and we discussed his level of veterinary spend. I noted it had increased and to my surprise he said "I spent more on antibiotics the year before I changed over to you". The key messages are antibiotic use is not always cheaper and prevention is better than cure!