

Antibiotic free meat: (im-)possibilities from a supply chain point of view

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Background

Antibiotics (AB) are widely used in livestock production, particularly pigs and poultry. The risk of development of resistance to antibiotics (ABR) has been recognized in the last decades. Main fear is that infections in humans, which currently can be treated rather easily with available ABs, will become incurable in the future. In response, initiatives are taken at various levels to reduce or even abandon use of ABs (ABU). Such initiatives have various (conflicting) impacts on the different actors in the value chain network, as well as on its organisation. Hence, reduction of ABU involves various aspects and many stakeholders, and requires a comprehensive inventory of (im-) possibilities and reasons thereof.

Objective

The objective is to inventorize the important issues regarding production, processing and marketing of meat produced with reduced or no ABU.

Program of the organized session

The session (approximately 90 minutes) starts with an introduction (HW Saatkamp) and ends with a short wrap-up and outlook (M Hartman). Short presentations and activities include:

1. Antibiotic use: the farm economic perspective (JL Roskam)
2. Antibiotics: perspective and demands from consumers (J Simons)
3. Reduction of ABU: the viewpoint of slaughterhouses and retail (D Oorburg)
4. Selection of 5 key-factors (HW Saatkamp)
5. Discussion of the 5 key-factors (moderation: J Simons)

Short contents of the presentations

Antibiotic use: the farm economic perspective (JL Roskam)

ABs are a relatively (very) cheap damage abatement input for livestock production. Moreover, in case of structural inefficiency and/or incidental diseases, ABU has a high marginal production value. This high economic value is a main incentive for ABU. Additionally, ABU can be a cheap (disease) risk management instrument. Hence, the economic impact of reducing ABU is determined by many ...

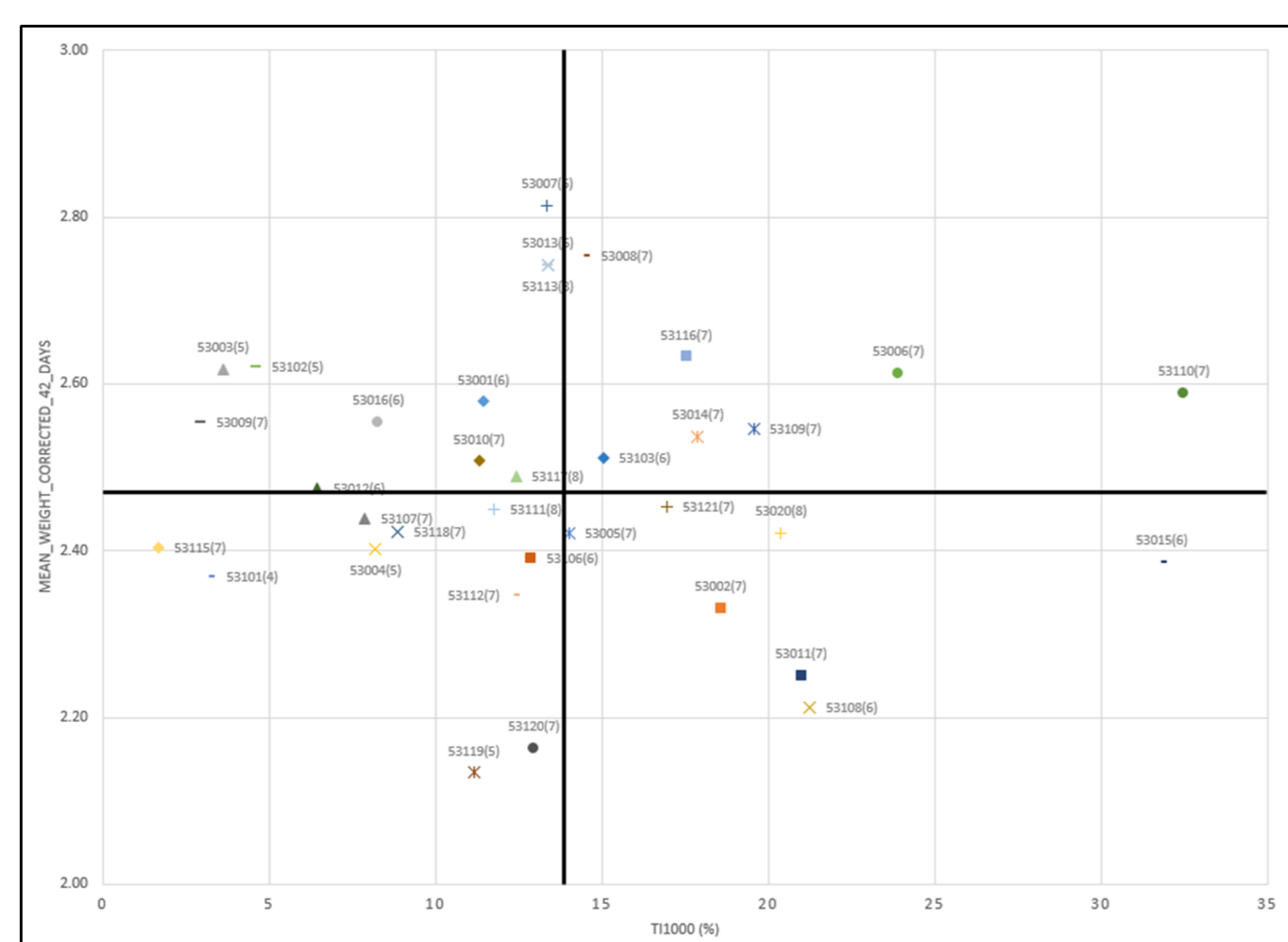


Figure 1. Average farm performance (weight at 42 days, Y-axis) and ABU (X-axis) for 35 Belgian broiler farms.

... (quite often) farm-specific factors, e.g. animal-disease interaction, farm health management and the risk-attitude of the farmer. Between farms, a large variation in ABU and production results occur (Figure 1). This offers prospects for reduction of ABU. However, ABU reduction without compromising farmers' income requires well-focused and farm-specific measures. This could harbor conflicts with harmonized sector-wide measures, i.e. acceptance and compliance by individual farmers. Summarized results of quantitative economic research will be presented.

Antibiotics: perspective and demands from consumers (J Simons)

Many consumers consider antibiotics as an integral and necessary part of an animal husbandry system that is perceived as rotten, nightmarish and only profit oriented. Resistances and as a consequence an increasing defenselessness against infections appear as a result of a condemnable treatment of animals. But even though the husbandry system in general and antibiotics in particular is experienced as threatening, many consumers succeed in suppressing and splitting off while purchasing, handling and eating meat. However, antibiotic free meat may have market prospects as – it is supposed to have a direct link to personal health.

Reduction of ABU: the viewpoint from slaughterhouses and retail (D Oorburg)

The adverse effects of a complete ban on ABU are unacceptable (e.g. impaired animal health and welfare) as well as unnecessary (i.e. in view of the development of AB resistance). Essential is aiming at the right balance of ABU, i.e. responsible ABU. This could serve the interests of both the consumers and producers. However, this requires a carefully developed implementation, particularly with regard to protocols of ABU, safe-guarding and auditing. Moreover, communication to both producers and consumers is vital for acceptance and compliance.

Aims of the structured discussion

- This requires an active involvement of the audience! The aim is to:
- Critically evaluate major determining issues for reduction of ABU during production and marketing of products
 - Discuss, and thereby inventorize, the (im-)possibilities for implementation (not only economical, but also organizational, institutional, etc.)
 - Identify strong and weak points of future brand concepts for meat with reduced or no ABU

Acknowledgements

With support from



by decision of the German Bundestag

European Community's Seventh Framework Programme [FP7/2007-2013]
Grant agreement number: 613754



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