

The fight against antimicrobial resistance depends on good agricultural practices

To ensure that antimicrobials are used responsibly and in ways that do not threaten public health and food production, a stronger global effort including larger investments and improved surveillance measures are needed, according to FAO Deputy Director-General, Maria Helena Semedo. Semedo was speaking at a United Nations General Assembly side event on antimicrobial resistance (AMR).



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"Good health, good productivity and good economies depend on safe and nutritious food. Prudent use of antimicrobials in public health and agriculture is essential to achieve this," Semedo said. "We need surveillance on antimicrobial use and the spread of AMR - not only through hospitals but throughout the food chain, including horticulture and the environment for more comprehensive risk assessments."

“ The use of antimicrobials in agriculture is not a substitute for insufficient hygiene and bad management practices. ”

Stronger links between health, agriculture and environment

The world needs to stave off the risk of having less efficient medicines to treat deadly infections due to the fact that more bacteria are becoming immune to antimicrobials. But this challenge posed by AMR is also "an opportunity to unite health, agriculture and environmental concerns in collaborative global action," Semedo said citing FAO's experience in Cambodia.

"One and one-half years ago (in Cambodia), there was little awareness of AMR in agriculture. There were little surveillance and few links with human health officials. By strengthening collaboration between health and agriculture ministries, helping draft rules to regulate the sale of veterinary medicines, and assisting animal health labs, we helped increase awareness and greater cooperation in dealing with AMR," she said.

Semedo noted how Cambodia is now sharing its experience with neighbouring countries and how FAO has experienced similar successes in Ghana, Kenya, Thailand, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Latin America and Central Asia.

Good agricultural practices

Semedo underscored the importance of work done at field level to bring AMR under control. "Progress in the fight against AMR depends on good agricultural practices. We need to promote sustainable agriculture and food systems," she said. "The use of antimicrobials in agriculture is not a substitute for insufficient hygiene and bad management practices."

She also said that "we need improved mechanisms for the quality assurance of pharmaceuticals because counterfeit, substandard medicines contribute to resistance. Although Codex Alimentarius develops impressive global surveillance guidance and codes of practice, there remains a staggering lack of capacity for adequate surveillance of AMR at national levels."

"I urge the international community to act now to invest in the future we want to build together," Semedo said.

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