A farmer feeding his chicken in a poultry house. PHOTO CREDIT: PASHAWISE

Zimbabwe's roadmap for tackling antimicrobial resistance in poultry and dairy systems

By Panagrimedia Correspondent

Zimbabwe has taken a significant step towards tackling antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in agrifood systems), with the development of a roadmap for reducing the need for antimicrobials in the poultry and dairy value chains.

The process was launched at a workshop convened in February by the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development (MLAFWRD) with technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), under the global Reduce the Need for Antimicrobials on Farms (RENOFARM) initiative.

The four-day workshop brought together government authorities, producers, private sector actors, academia, civil society and development partners to co-design a nationally aligned framework for action grounded in a One Health approach.

Antimicrobial resistance remains one of the most serious threats to food security, public health and sustainable development. In Zimbabwe, rising disease pressure in poultry and dairy systems, gaps in biosecurity, limited access to diagnostics, and inappropriate antimicrobial use continue to drive AMR risks across the food chain.

From evidence to action

Opening the workshop, government officials underscored the need to move from fragmented interventions to coordinated, value-chain-wide action aligned with Zimbabwe's National Action Plan on AMR (2024–2028) and the National One Health Strategic Plan.

"The roadmap process allows us

to bring all actors around the same table and agree on practical, country-owned solutions that improve productivity while safeguarding animal, human and environmental health," said Mark Obonyo, FAO AMR Coordinator for Southern Africa. "Reducing the need for antimicrobials starts with better prevention, better farming practices and better connections across the value chain."

Participants reviewed the current AMR and antimicrobial use (AMU) situation in poultry and dairy production, drawing on surveillance data, research findings and recent knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) surveys. Evidence presented during the workshop highlighted significant levels of antimicrobial resistance in poultry systems, including detection of ESBL E. coli strains and Salmonella strains resistant to several commonly used antimicrobials, alongside persistent challenges such as weak biosecurity, informal medicine markets and limited laboratory capacity.

In the dairy sector, participants examined the economic and food safety implications of antimicrobial residues in milk, including product rejection and income losses, particularly among medium and large-scale producers.

"Technical solutions alone are not enough," noted Anica Buckel, FAO behavioural science expert. "To sustainably reduce antimicrobial use, interventions must address the social, economic and behavioural realities farmers face, from peer influence to market pressures."

Participants endorsed a shared national goal: to improve productivity, food safety and market access in poultry and dairy systems through good farming practices that reduce reliance on antimicrobials and ensure residue-free food.

Interventions were grouped under eight thematic priority areas, including disease prevention and biosecurity, nutrition and feed systems, antimicrobial stewardship, capacity building, behaviour change, market incentives, regulation and governance. In total, 21 priority actions were jointly developed, spanning farm-level improvements, surveillance, certification, consumer awareness, research and public–private partnerships.

In Zimbabwe, rising disease pressure in poultry and dairy systems, with inappropriate antimicrobial use continue to drive AMR risks across the food chain. *PHOTO CREDIT: PASHAWISE*

"The strength of this roadmap lies in its co-design," said Esther Dsani, FAO Regional AMR Coordinator. "It reflects the realities of farmers, the responsibilities of regulators and the role of markets in driving change, while aligning Zimbabwe with global efforts to reduce antimicrobial use in agrifood systems."

Building on existing gains

The roadmap builds on FAO-supported interventions already underway in Zimbabwe, including poultry Farmer Field Schools established in districts such as Beitbridge, Mangwe, Hurungwe and Kariba, which have demonstrated improvements in biosecurity, husbandry and disease prevention. It also responds directly to gaps identified through dairy value chain AMR KAP surveys conducted in Chipinge, Mutare and Gweru.

Leadership from MLAFWRD remained central throughout the process, with participants agreeing on governance arrangements to oversee implementation, monitoring and coordination across sectors.

"This roadmap provides us with a practical tool to sustain and scale up what is already working, while addressing regulatory, behavioural and capacity gaps," said Dr Tinashe Hodobo, One Health Secretariat representative. "Its success will depend on continued collaboration and accountability."

Next steps

In the coming months, MLAFWRD, with support from FAO, will finalise the roadmap document, including detailed costing, timelines and a monitoring and evaluation framework. A technical validation meeting will precede official endorsement and wider dissemination.

Early implementation activities are expected to focus on scaling up Farmer Field Schools, strengthening biosecurity and vaccination programmes, piloting residue monitoring, promoting alternatives to antimicrobials, and launching national behaviour change and consumer awareness campaigns. Resource mobilization and public–private partnerships will be critical to close identified funding gaps.

By translating evidence into coordinated action, Zimbabwe's RENOFARM roadmap marks a decisive step towards safer food, healthier animals and more resilient agrifood systems.