



Chicken farmers facing a lack of resources resort to the use of antibiotics to minimise losses from diseases in live:

Government aid for upgrades inadequate, Hong Kong chicken farmers say

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While modernising chicken farms may be a way to improve hygiene practices and reduce the [controversial use of antibiotics on healthy livestock](#), the upgrade is not an easy one for local farmers working in a sunset industry.

This was despite the New Agriculture Policy, a government initiative in last year's policy address that included the establishment of a HK\$500 million fund to support sustainable development.

Professor Terence Lau Lok-ting, convenor of Polytechnic University's food safety consortium, said introduction of modern practices to local farms could possibly reduce the misuse of antibiotics in the poultry trade.

Fears have escalated over antimicrobial resistance developing among livestock, with recent reports of drugs being administered to healthy poultry for the prevention of diseases instead of fighting off present infections.

Lau, who is also a member of an expert committee on antimicrobial resistance, said: "Modernisation of farms might help to enhance productivity ... such as [improving] management, skill sets or good tactics."

With more advanced facilities, productivity could be improved without antibiotics, he added.

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Heung Yam-chun, an owner of three local chicken farms, does not use antibiotics on his healthy poultry, but said it cost him millions to invest in systems for temperature control, automated feeding and faeces removal to improve hygiene in his farms since the avian flu outbreak in 1997.

"If the breeding environment was good, farmers would resort to using fewer antibiotics," Heung, who is also a member of the city's advisory committee on agriculture and fisheries, said.

He added that some farmers might turn to the drug for their livestock if farm facilities failed to maintain a constant temperature to keep the birds warm during extreme weather changes.

But not all the 29 chicken farms in the city were able to upgrade their facilities. The farmers claimed that government assistance was inadequate to resolve space and money issues that plagued the industry.

Lee Leung-kei, a chicken farmer who relies on manpower to feed his livestock, said his farm was too small for modernisation.

“It wouldn’t be cost effective to install an automated cleaning and feeding belt system,” he said.

With the limitations, Lee had to administer a small dosage of antibiotics even to healthy chickens, to maintain productivity and prevent them from falling ill.

Under current regulations, he cannot relocate his farm unless it is affected by government development projects.

Even the Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund, which aimed to provide financial support for modernisation in local agriculture, was also inadequate to cover his costs.

Lee said each farmer could only be granted a maximum of HK\$30,000. “How can I upgrade fully with this amount?” he asked.

The Food and Health Bureau said it was aware of concerns expressed by members of the poultry trade and was open to relocation suggestions.

The government said the amount of financial support would be reviewed from time to time based on inflation and adjustments to farming equipment prices.

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