Protecting the Poultry Industry

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Our theme this year for World Veterinary Day is “Antimicrobial Resistance”, and I was invited to posit some thoughts on Antimicrobial use in the Poultry Industry. I’ll begin by sharing with you a quick definition on the word “antimicrobial”.

An antimicrobial is any drug or chemical that ‘works against’ an infectious disease agent in an animal or human so the infection is eliminated. In the food animal industry, antimicrobials are used for disease prevention, treatment or growth promotion. These antimicrobials can be antivirals such as acyclovir, antibiotics such as penicillin, antiprotozoals such as coccidiostats, antifungals, such as ketoconazole, and antiparasitics such as albendazole. Where necessary, coccidiostats and antibiotics are the types most frequently used in the poultry industry.

Coccidiostats are used in the management of the disease coccidiosis, which usually affects the digestive system causing bloody diarrhea and serious losses.

Antibiotics should only be utilized in disease treatment under a veterinarian’s advice. Antibiotics should really be a last resort as the diseases in poultry, usually expressed as ‘sneezing’, ‘yaws’, ‘flushing’ poor weight gain and ‘not doing well’ are often a result of a poorly managed environment. If one strives to ensure clean, disinfected premises and maintains

proper biosecurity – i.e. managing physical environment to minimize exposure to microbial disease agents, then the use of antibiotics in disease treatment should be rarely needed.

The *withdrawal period* is the minimum length of time before slaughter that the administration of a drug must be stopped. With chicken is the most widely consumed protein in Jamaica, much care is taken to ensure that in the last stages of growth, medicated feed or water is replaced with unmedicated. This is to ensure clearance of the drugs from the animal's system so no residues are left in the meat which might have implications for humans, including the development of antimicrobial resistance.