

Written evidence submitted by MSD Animal Health (FFS0015)

About MSD Animal Health MSD Animal Health, a division of Merck & Co., Inc., Rahway, N.J., USA, is the global animal health business of MSD. Through its commitment to The Science of Healthier Animals®, MSD Animal Health offers veterinarians, farmers, producers, pet owners and governments one of the widest ranges of veterinary pharmaceuticals, vaccines and health management solutions and services as well as an extensive suite of connected technology that includes identification, traceability and monitoring products.

MSD Animal Health UK plays a crucial role in the food supply chain here in the UK. The preventive health approaches included in our portfolio of biopharmaceutical and technology products support the health and welfare of animals, assist in promoting and improving farming efficiency and productivity, and contribute to environmental sustainability goals.

MSD Animal Health is present in more than 50 countries, while its products are available in some 150 markets. As such, we are well placed to represent the views of those in our sector and would be happy to share them with the committee and provide evidence for Select Committee Inquiries on behalf of the industry.

Response to Fairness in the Food Supply Chain Consultation

As a global animal health business, MSD Animal Health's work helps to deliver a safe and sustainable food supply. Below we set out key issues relating to fairness in the food supply chain.

Improving Consumer Trust through improved welfare monitoring, auditing and adoption of tracing technology

It is well known that a large segment of consumers make conscious purchasing decisions based on method of production and welfare standards. However, as it stands there is a lack of accountability for poor standards and a clear barrier in terms of traceability and identification. Within the food supply chain there is a clear inability to link food chain records, inaccuracy and errors in records and delays in obtaining essential data.

Recent polling conducted by YouGov found that consumer trust in the food system has fallen with 39% of British adults saying they do not trust major food brands and supermarkets to tell the truth about where food comes from, or the farms that produce it. Therefore, to provide confidence to the consumer and the ability to independently verify the production and welfare claims made on product labelling and advertising, **MSD Animal Health recommend that assurance should not only be provided through auditing, but also the application of accurate and precise traceability technology to verify method of production of products presented at point of sale.**

Using tracing technology to verify production claims

There are already various animal welfare labelling schemes in operation throughout the UK, but the adoption and implementation of sophisticated DNA-based schemes can provide greater certainty to consumers. For example, the roll-out of the DNA TraceBack® programme for the Irish pig sector helped to increase the sales of Irish pig meat by preventing misleading labelling, thus securing a premium price for Irish pig meat.

Additionally, DNA TraceBack® has been adopted by the British retailer M&S, which became the first UK retailer to trace its full range of beef products including complex products such as burgers, lasagne, pies and corned beef. This traceability programme helped to reinforce a culture of compliance in the supply chain for all primary, added value and convenience products sold under the M&S brand.

These schemes are, in many cases, well-known to consumers. They support UK producers to evidence the high standards that they produce to and provide a framework for continuous improvement on animal health and welfare. However, there is also an opportunity to make the assurance processes behind these schemes more robust, in order to meet increasing consumer and retailer expectations.

Consistent application of these schemes will also benefit consumers through increasing reliability and trust.

Improve animal welfare and increase vaccination rates

MSD Animal Health welcomes future farming schemes that reward farmers who prioritise animal health as it is linked to achieving sustainable food production.

Good animal health is an essential part of good animal welfare and disease prevention is an essential part of maintaining good animal health. Vaccination has a key role to play in reducing endemic disease in both pets and livestock. Currently, less than 20% of UK farm animals in the UK are vaccinated against endemic diseases. Increased adoption of animal vaccination would not only result in healthier animals, but would also lessen the number of animals suffering from preventable diseases.

The National Office for Animal Health's [Livestock Vaccination Guideline](#) which was published in 2022 sets out expert recommendations for the vaccination of UK cattle and sheep. It highlights that one of the key practices that the Government should be adopting when it comes to reducing emissions associated with agriculture is introducing a core vaccination programme for UK livestock, and enabling vaccination costs to be recouped through Environment Land Management schemes. MSDAH supports this recommendation, and believes more can be done to increase vaccination rates.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, global meat consumption is projected to increase by 14% by 2030. The UK livestock sector will therefore have to keep pace with this demand. Disease can pose a threat to this and must be tackled by farmers through preventative health measures such as vaccinations. In addition, preventative herd and flock health can bring sustainable advantages. Data suggest that UK vaccination programmes against infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) could reduce carbon emissions by 277 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide; the equivalent to removing about 60,000 cars from the road each year.

Healthy animals achieve higher growth rates, milk yields or egg production from each unit of input. They also have improved fertility, longer lifespans and better-quality carcasses on slaughter. Higher producing or faster growing animals require less land, water and fossil fuel for each unit of output. For whatever the farming system, healthy livestock will achieve better performance and have the potential to achieve higher standards of welfare. MSD Animal Health would therefore like to see greater funding made available for adoption of vaccination and technologies that improve animal health and productivity and thus contribute to UK food security.

Recommendations:

- **Assurance should not only be provided through auditing, but also the application of accurate and precise traceability technology to verify method of production of products presented at point of sale.**
- **Monitoring schemes are, in many cases, well-known to consumers. They support UK producers to evidence the high standards that they produce to and provide a framework for continuous improvement on animal health and welfare. However, there is also an opportunity to make the assurance processes behind these schemes more robust, in order to meet increasing consumer and retailer expectations.**
- **Greater funding made available for adoption of vaccination and technologies that improve animal health and productivity and thus contribute to UK food security.**

January 2025