

Key changes to Red Tractor standards from 1 February 2025

Aligning with the revised Veterinary Medicines Regulations

Antibiotics for Prophylaxis

Red Tractor is introducing some updates to its standards on the prophylactic use of antibiotics. These changes aim to strike a balance between promoting responsible antibiotic use and considering the practical realities of veterinary care on farms. Here are the main points to know:

Key Requirement 1: Prophylactic Use is Prohibited Except in Exceptional Circumstances

From 1 February 2025, the use of antibiotics for prophylaxis is prohibited, except in exceptional circumstances. This applies to all Red Tractor livestock and poultry farms.

Please note, Red Tractor's poultry standards previously prevented prescription of antibiotics for prophylaxis *under any circumstances*. However, a revision to this requirement means poultry vets can now prescribe antibiotics for prophylaxis if they feel exceptional circumstances warrant it.

Key Requirement 2: Providing a Clear Rationale for Every Prescription

Starting in February 2025, your rationale for prescribing antibiotics for prophylaxis must be documented alongside each prescription. This goes beyond the updated legal requirements, which only ask for justification when prescribing for group prophylaxis. For Red Tractor compliance, all prophylactic prescriptions, whether for an individual or a group, must be backed by a documented reason and evidence.

Key Requirement 3: Management Review for Group Prophylaxis

For prophylaxis via group administration (in-feed, in-water, in milk/milk replacer), there's an additional requirement: a management review. When prescribing prophylactic antibiotics to a group, you need to document your review of management practices, outlining risk factors and measures to be taken to eliminate the need for future group prophylaxis.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) has provided a template, [available on the Red Tractor website](#), to help with this process. While using the template is optional, the review itself is not. Keeping clear and thorough documentation will help ensure compliance and lead to better management practices.

Timing of Management Reviews

The legislation emphasises that management reviews should happen as close to the time of prescription as possible. To clarify, Red Tractor has set specific timing guidelines for different sectors:

- **Pigs:** Reviews should be done at or by the next quarterly visit.
- **Poultry:** Reviews must take place at or before the placement of the next flock, or no later than three months after prescription, whichever is sooner.

- **Ruminants:** Reviews need to be done within three months of the prescription. Waiting for the next annual visit or health plan review is not acceptable.

These timelines are designed to ensure that reviews remain timely and relevant to the prescription.

Medicated Feed Prescriptions

Starting in February 2025, Red Tractor assessors will be checking that medicated feed prescriptions include certain key information. These include:

- The species of animal, the number of animals, and their ID
- The diagnosed disease being treated or prevented
- The name, active substance, amount of product prescribed, and inclusion rates (both medicinal premix and active ingredient)
- The overall amount of feed to be supplied under the prescription

Assessors will also verify that farmers are using medicated feed as prescribed.

Other updates:

Dry Cow Therapy in Dairy Standards

The updated Red Tractor Dairy standards will require specific reference to dry cow therapy in both the Health Plan and the Health and Performance Review. To ensure that dry cow therapy is regularly discussed with farmers, helping to keep strategies for managing dry periods robust while supporting antibiotic stewardship.

Proactive Measures for Antibiotic Stewardship in Dairy Standards

Antibiotic stewardship is key for dairy farmers and essential for maintaining Red Tractor membership while ensuring milk quality. Two key measures will be introduced from February 2025:

- **Medicine Training Refresher:** Farmers and their staff will need to refresh their medicine training every five years to keep up with the latest practices in responsible medicine use. At least one person on the unit must have undergone training in the last five years – either a refresher course to follow a course taken previously, or a full course approved by Red Tractor if it's the person's first training in this area. We keep a list of approved medicines training providers on our [website here](#).
- **Residue Failure Investigations:** If a farm experiences two antibiotic residue failures within a rolling 12-month period, they'll need to complete the [BCVA](#) or [Dairy UK](#) investigation form. This helps identify the causes and take corrective actions to prevent future failures.