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UN Warns of Threat to Food Security from Overuse of Antibiotics

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The overuse of antibiotics is impacting rural livelihoods and food security, and requires globally coordinated efforts, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said on Wednesday.

The influx of medicines fosters increasing resistance among the very microbes that cause the infections and disease they were designed to quell, threatening to reverse a century of progress in human and animal health, FAO Deputy Director-General Helena Semedo warned.

“Antimicrobial resistance is a global threat that in this inter-connected world cannot be solved in Europe alone,” Semedo said while speaking to European ministers of health and agriculture.

During her speech, she advocated for stricter drug administration regulations along with monitoring initiatives, in countries where the risk of antimicrobial resistance is high.

Considering that seven out of every 10 newly discovered human diseases are of animal origin, she called for the establishment of a national surveillance system for antimicrobial resistance to collect data on resistance by bacteria to various medicines, as well as surveillance in the animal health and agriculture sectors.

Broad improvements in hygiene, disease prevention, veterinary oversight and accurate and affordable diagnostics, as well as ensuring quality nutrition to improve the overall health of livestock and fish through safe feed and suitable breeds, are critical in reducing the overuse of antibiotics, she said.