

Alternative Supplements to Traditional Medication

IAHJ Speaks with Marc Paepa of Herbavita about Herbal Animal Feed Supplements

Q. Since 1994 Herbavita has been developing and marketing a wide range of animal feed supplements based on herbal extracts and essential oils, making them a reliable partner for sustainable results for more than 20 years. With the decline in use of veterinary medicine and the increase in alternative organic and natural products, how has Herbavita met the demand for healthier, more profitable animal production?

In the 90s the use and abuse of medication in animal feed was associated with human health effects. That is why Herbavita has strongly focused on alternative supplements to traditional medication for the last 25 years. We believe that supporting the animal's immune system results in higher farm profits. Healthy animals do perform better! By developing a complete range of feed supplements, based on herbal extracts and essential oils, Herbavita has succeeded in creating an alternative way to meet the needs of modern farming. Our natural alternative supplements support animals facing specific issues, such as gut health in calves and poultry and udder health in dairy cattle. Our interest is primarily focused on preventing health issues by increasing the animal's immunity and thus improving the return on the company, not only for short-term effects but also with a vision for the future. This is important as farmers have little or no influence on the sales prices of animals. The only way for them to save money is to improve efficiency. By improving the resistance and digestion, it is possible to reduce costs for production.

Q. Stricter legislation and higher quality requirements have made both farmers and consumers aware of the benefits of healthy and natural breeding methods on the one hand and of profitable and economically viable ones on the other. Could you tell us a little more about how Herbavita has become FCA (Feed Chain Alliance) certified and how this shows both customers and control institutions that your company operates in compliance with the European Legislation?

From the start we ensured the integrity of our food manufacturing process by complying with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) with certification from Integra, and afterwards became FCA certified. After repeated crises such as the 'Dioxin Crisis' in Belgium, it was clear that a quality system was necessary in our sector, and thus GMP was established as a direct consequence. This means that the legal aspects are always strictly monitored. Hazards for animals, humans and the environment are identified. The system has been refined for more than 15 years. Herbavita has always ensured that the latest new procedures are implemented and applied. Constant audits by both the government (FAVV) and the FCA organisation ensure that affiliated companies, and therefore also Herbavita, make every effort to comply with the relevant legislation and strive for optimum quality. After all, FCA provides procedures to check and control the purchased raw materials. These checks not only include legal aspects, but also the quality of raw materials.

Q. It is clear to see that Herbavita is a pioneer in the use of phytochemicals such as Rokipo, which consists of plant-derived, bioactive substances to stimulate growth during the last eight days of a hen's fattening period. With the emerging issue of building up resilience against certain pharmaceutical compounds, how does Herbavita's preventative approach use what nature offers in a sustainable, safe way?

The composition of our herbal supplements is based on phytotherapy. The typical characteristic for phytotherapy is the use of a complete plant/herb (or a part) without identification of individual active compounds. The idea of phytotherapy is that all compounds in a plant have their own particular action in the animal's body and bring a balance in each compound. For instance, in regular medicine, active substances of plants are isolated and synthetically reproduced (aspirin out of *Salix alba*, morphine out of *Papaver*). The reason to isolate substances is because regular medicine wants to standardise a substance without intervention of ballast substances in order to reproduce the molecule synthetically. Plant extracts consist of a number of active components. Since those active components are not synthetically produced, there is a certain variety in the different batches and yields of each plant extract.

These minuscule differences ensure that no habituation occurs. The plant extract can be used at its full power, or as we say in Dutch "Het plantextract kan steeds aangewend worden met zijn volle kracht". In the case of Rokipo, we use components that influence the immunity system, the nervous system and digestion, etc. This unique composition provides the extra support that poultry currently needs. At the end of the fattening period, the poultry must deal with a lot of stress. The infection pressure increases, there is very little space for them to move around in and it is hard to get them to drink and eat. These are all factors that cause extra stress, decrease of appetite and lower immunity. Rokipo responds to the needs that are specific to this period of the fattening phase.

Q. Scientific research has shown that a healthy gastrointestinal system can help poultry achieve optimal production of meat or eggs, so it should come as no surprise that the proper balance of intestinal microbiota is highly responsible for gut health, especially in the role of commensal microbiota. With that in mind, why should consumers choose alternative sources of ruminant nutrition as opposed to veterinary medicines to aid good gut health in poultry?

Recently, more research has been carried out looking at the connection between intestinal flora and optimal health. Gut health is not only important for digestion but also affects general health and immunity. Hippocrates was correct when he claimed that 'disease begins in the gut'. By preventing inflammation in the gut, many problems will be prevented. While people often wonder how to rebuild gut flora after the use of antibiotics, the better question is how can we prevent the use of antibiotics? Pro- and prebiotics have proven their effect and herbals also

It's in our nature to take care of your livestock

have a supporting role in the gastro-intestinal tract. Optimal gut health is not only necessary for increased production, but it will also result in a healthier and more vital animal. Besides, these natural alternatives in animal feed will not harm the end consumer.

Q. While herbal extracts and organic acids have been tested in the diets of pigs as potential alternatives to antibiotics on growth promotion, consumers and critics have questioned the effectiveness of an antibiotic-free system and its strategies for addressing feed intake, digestion and growth rate. What measures is Herbavita taking to improve the palatability and productive performance of swine, poultry and cattle, with its use of herbal extracts, when the addition of phytogenics is limited?

Many studies prove that there are many alternatives to antibiotics that aid growth promotion such as herbals and butyric acid. Herbavita adds organic acids, herbals and essential oils to improve palatability as well as digestion, in order to improve technical results. It is indeed the case that it is often questioned whether the effect of herbs and organic acids is strong enough to be a good alternative to antibiotics. People that criticise an antibiotic-free system, often only focus on the short-term economical results. Many studies prove that the frequent preventative use of antibiotics cause damage to both humans and animals. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics lead to increasing drug-resistance causing treatments to be less effective, increases severity of diseases, reduced productivity and economic losses. So we have no other option than to minimise the use of antibiotics preventively worldwide. In addition, many studies prove that there are many alternatives to antibiotics or growth promoters, which is why people are seeking alternative measures such as herbals. Herbavita provides

carefully composed products based on organic acids, herbal extracts and essential oils to improve palatability, as well as digestion and animal health which automatically improves technical results. By using these alternatives, the above negative effects of the overuse of antibiotics can be reduced. Moreover, no resistance can be developed for herbs so that they do not lose their effectiveness.

Herbavita is concerned about the welfare of animals, people and the environment. To avoid that future generations cannot be treated with antibiotics anymore and we must reduce its use to the bare minimum. That is why Herbavita has spent the last 25 years focusing on antibiotic-free alternatives. Although it is a challenge to reduce the use of antibiotics, we have to keep in mind that nature has a lot to offer. Herbavita has succeeded not only in supporting animals but also helping them to perform better too. After all, we strongly believe in the concept that 'prevention is better than a cure'. By focusing on immunity, gut health, detoxification and respiratory health, a better production result can be achieved. Subsequently, through the production of innovative, natural products, Herbavita is contributing to a healthier world.



Marc Paepe

Marc Paepe founded Herbavita bvba at the age of 24, together with his father Robert Paepe in March 1994. Marc studied accountancy, but always believed in the power of nature, therefore he also trained as a Herbalist. This has helped him to achieve the goal to find an alternative for antibiotics in livestock.

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