

Farmer and Rancher Statement on Antibiotic Use in Animal Agriculture

September 19, 2012

Agriculture professionals call for an end to the imprudent use of antibiotics in animal agriculture

Resistance to antibiotic drugs is a growing health crisis, fueled by widespread overuse of antibiotics in both agriculture and in human medicine. Leading health experts and scientific bodies concur that nontherapeutic use of antibiotics in animal agriculture leads to antibiotic-resistant infections in humans.

As American farmers and ranchers raising beef cattle, dairy cattle, pigs, and poultry, we are doing our part to address this crisis by avoiding unnecessary uses of antibiotics on our farms and ranches.

We believe the imprudent use of antibiotics not only renders antibiotics less effective or ineffective for sick farm animals, it also threatens public health and the safety of our nation's food supply. We are concerned for the health of our customers, our neighbors, our employees, and our own families.

Our farms and ranches demonstrate that it is possible to protect public health and offer Americans a steady supply of food. And they show that it is not only possible but actually economically viable to produce meat, dairy products, and eggs that are safe to eat without continually dosing animals with drugs they don't need.

The problem of antibiotic overuse is enormous. Recent Food and Drug Administration (FDA) data show that nearly 80 percent of all antibiotics sold in the United States are used in animal agriculture. The majority of these drugs—many of which are critical in both animal and human medicine—are routinely given to livestock and poultry that are not sick. This is done not to treat disease, but to promote faster animal growth and to stave off diseases caused by raising animals in overcrowded, unsanitary living conditions. We avoid overuse of antibiotics in our operations by keeping animals healthy through sound husbandry practices.

The routine use of medically important antibiotics in animal agriculture selects for antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can cause a range of serious human diseases. Those most strongly linked to agricultural overuse of antibiotics include food poisoning caused by resistant *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. More recently, animal agriculture has also been linked to other resistant human infections, including resistant *E. coli* infections and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections. Many studies indicate that consumers are likely to come into contact with these dangerous bacteria through the meat they buy in their supermarket.

News reports of such infections undermine consumer confidence in the safety of meat, poultry, and dairy products. We only have to look at American consumers' responses to recent disease outbreaks caused by contaminated spinach or apple juice to understand the business implications of outbreaks linked to food products derived from animals. Such outbreaks pose a real danger to our livelihoods.

We strongly support an immediate end to the imprudent use of antibiotics in animal agriculture and call on the FDA and Congress to work together to make that happen. And we stand committed to delivering to market the best, safest foods possible. Americans deserve no less.

Signed:

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