



Facts about Antibiotics

U.S. farmers and ranchers are dedicated to supplying the safety, highest quality and affordable source of protein in the world. That is meat, milk and eggs produced in the most efficient way while taking care to assure proper animal well-being and environmental sustainability.

Food animals kept in housing are no more likely to get sick than animals kept in the open. In fact, animals and birds kept in houses are generally healthier because they are protected. Despite media reports to the contrary, NO scientific linkage has been made between the use antibiotics in animal production and antibiotic resistance in humans. In fact, most antibiotics used in animal production are not used in the treatment of humans.

To prevent illness and to ensure that an animal remains healthy all its life, producers take preventive measures, including the use of animal health products. These products are given to the animal in a scientifically formulated feed best suited to the animal's needs and all are approved and regulated by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration for use in animals as directed.

Because of their high cost, farmers and ranchers cannot afford to over use animal health products. They use animal drugs and vaccines only when it is in the best interest of the animal to ensure its well-being or when necessary to protect the food supply. Farmers and ranchers know that a sick and stressed animal is bad for their bottom line and can possibly present a risk to the food supply. The well-being of the animal would be negatively comprised if a farmer or rancher did not have the necessary animal products with which to treat his sick animals.

Antibiotics are used in minute doses in farm animals' water or feed to protect them from disease or illness. The average amount in medicated feed is 4 to 25 grams per ton of feed. In addition, the majority of antibiotics used in the U.S. are for preventing and curing illness.

In 2007, total sales for use in animals rose 5% over 2006, according to the Animal Health Institute. One factor that may have contributed to the increase was an increase in U.S. meat production of more than 2 billion pounds.

The amount of the total used for growth and efficiency in 2007 was estimated to be 13%, up from less than 5% the previous year. Two factors accounted for this increase, according to AHI. First, revisions to prior years' reports were recognized. Second, some increase was expected as animal producers struggle with high grain prices and seek to capture both the economic efficiencies and the health benefits derived from the use of these products. Notably, the entire increase in the percentage of the total amount used for growth and efficiency was in ionophores, compounds not used in human medicine. The amount of non-ionophore compounds used for growth declined slightly in 2007.

To keep the amount of antibiotic use in perspective, consider that there are many more food-producing animals than humans. In fact, there are approximately 305 million people versus:

7.5 billion chickens
292 million turkeys
109 million cattle
92 million pigs
7 million sheep

In the European Union, where antibiotic growth promoters were banned in 1998, the incidence of disease increased and more treatments with antibiotics were needed than before the ban. Notably, no reduction in human resistance levels has been shown since the ban took effect. FDA requires extensive toxicological testing to determine safe levels of any antibiotic residue in animal tissue or milk. As an added measure of safety, FDA can require producers to withhold a treated animal from slaughter, providing even more time for the antibiotic to clear the animal's system before its meat enters the food supply chain. FDA applies large margins of safety – from 100 to 2000-fold – in establishing mandatory withdrawal times. Moreover, each tank of milk is tested for antibiotic residues and if any violations are detected, the entire tank of milk is discarded. Meat is similarly monitored at slaughter points.

All antibiotics used in livestock and poultry are approved on basis of their safety. Producers are required to follow 'Judicious Antibiotic Use Guidelines.' Extra-label use of feed additives is illegal and strictly prohibited. Withdrawal times must be strictly adhered to avoid violative residues.

Affordability of U.S.-produced food

The efficiency in today's agriculture means that American consumers spend only 10% of their income on food. This compares to elsewhere in the world where 18-25% of consumers' income goes toward the purchase of food.

A family affair

A common misbelieve is that large corporations control today's farms and ranchers, but the fact of the matter is that 99% of U.S. farms and ranches are still owned by individuals and family corporations or partnerships. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are only 7,000 non-family-controlled corporate farms in the United States. This compares with some 2 million plus family-owned operations.

For more facts on your food and the food production system, visit:

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