



## Support S. 549/H.R. 962 to Stop Antibiotic Overuse on Factory Farms

Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Jack Reed (D-RI) have introduced **S. 549** and Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY) has introduced **H.R. 962** to phase out the routine feeding of antibiotics to farm animals. It is common practice on factory farms to use feed laced with antibiotics for pigs, cows, chickens, and turkeys in an effort to speed growth and prevent disease in unsanitary, overcrowded, and stressful facilities. The drugs are used as a crutch to maintain animals in terribly inhumane conditions.

- **Antibiotics are used on a massive scale in animal agriculture.** An estimated 70% of all antibiotics in this country are used “nontherapeutically” (for growth promotion or disease prevention) in farm animals, according to a study by the Union of Concerned Scientists. Human use of antibiotics accounts for an estimated 3 million pounds per year, compared to an estimated 24.6 million pounds per year used nontherapeutically in farm animals – more than 8 times as much!
- **These drugs are used without prescriptions and may involve no veterinary oversight.** Large quantities are readily available over-the-counter in liquid form or pre-mixed in feedbags sold at feed stores. Many are the same as, or closely related to, antibiotics used in human medicine, e.g., penicillins, tetracyclines, and erythromycin.
- **Overuse of antibiotics in farm animals contributes to the growing crisis of antibiotic resistance.** Bacteria become resistant to antibiotics through overexposure – in other words, when they are urgently needed to treat sick people or animals, they no longer work. Even the most careful use of antibiotics can result in the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, but widespread and inappropriate use of these precious drugs greatly accelerates the process. Resistant bacteria from farm animals can be transferred to people via 1) consumption of contaminated meat; 2) worker exposure at farms, slaughterhouses, and processing plants, which can also jeopardize the worker’s family and community; and 3) environmental routes, as manure-filled lagoons leak or manure is sprayed on fields for fertilizer (up to 75% of antibiotics pass through animals, unmetabolized, into the waste, along with antibiotic-resistant bacteria). What makes these exposures particularly dangerous is that bacteria can transfer genes for resistance to other, wholly unrelated, forms of bacteria (even within the human intestine), effectively “teaching” each other how to outwit antibiotics.
- **Public health experts agree that there is a clear link between routine antibiotic use in farm animals and bacterial resistance in people.** Numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies have shown this link, leading the American Medical Association (AMA), American Public Health Association, the American College of Preventive Medicine, the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, the National Association of Public Health Veterinarians, the World Health Organization, and others to oppose continued nontherapeutic use of medically important antibiotics in animal agriculture.
- **Antibiotics are too important a resource to squander in order to maintain inhumane and unhealthful practices on factory farms.** Modern medicine depends on effective antibiotics. Children and the elderly, surgery and transplant patients, and individuals with cancer, AIDS-HIV, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, and other diseases are among the many who are especially vulnerable to infections requiring antibiotics. Particularly at a time of concern about potential terrorist attacks, we cannot afford to waste such an important weapon in our medical arsenal.

- **This legislation will address this looming crisis in a responsible and effective way.** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is already authorized to withdraw agricultural antibiotics from the market, but its regulatory procedures for drug withdrawals are so cumbersome that such action would likely take decades. To avoid this unacceptable delay, the bills amend the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act to withdraw approvals for nontherapeutic agricultural use of eight specific antibiotics or classes of antibiotics within two years unless the Secretary determines that continued nontherapeutic use is reasonably certain not to harm human health. All eight are now used in human medicine or are so closely related to human-use drugs that they trigger cross-resistance concerns.

For nontherapeutic antibiotics that are currently only used in animals (those not on the list of eight specified in the legislation), this legislation would automatically restrict their nontherapeutic use in farm animals if they become important for human medicine.

The Senate bill would authorize funds to farmers to help defray transitional costs associated with phasing out nontherapeutic use of medically important antibiotics, and authorize research and demonstration projects to assist farmers in this transition.

To help public health officials track implementation of the phase out and ensure a smooth transition, the bills also require producers of agricultural antibiotics to submit data on the quantity of drugs they sell for each species, and the claimed purpose of those drugs.

- **This legislation is feasible and cost-effective.** In a 1999 report, the National Academy of Sciences estimated that banning all nontherapeutic use of antibiotics in farm animals (which is broader than the legislation's reach) would raise meat prices by less than \$5 to \$10 per person annually. This is a small price to pay compared to the huge potential health care costs and associated human and animal suffering if antibiotics become ineffective and we return to an era in which untreatable infectious diseases become common.

Routine use of antibiotics in animal feed has already been banned in the European Union. The World Health Organization issued a report in August 2003 documenting the successful and cost-effective efforts in Denmark – the world's largest pork exporter, where concentrated animal production is common. The WHO report showed that Denmark's phase out of antibiotic feed additives yielded a 54% decrease in antibiotic use and dramatically reduced levels of resistant bacteria in just a few years without any adverse impacts on food safety or meat prices. Danish farmers have been able to maintain cost-effective production without routine antibiotic use by improving their animal husbandry practices and providing cleaner facilities, and they've seen fast and substantial benefits as a result.

- **It's time for factory farms in the United States to wean themselves from their indefensible practice of feeding enormous quantities of antibiotics to farm animals to compensate for unhealthy conditions.** Several fast food restaurant chains and poultry producers have claimed to be curbing antibiotics in their products, in the wake of recent media attention. While we welcome their voluntary commitments, this legislation is urgently needed to ensure a level playing field, accountability, and prompt comprehensive action to address this crisis.