

# For the Record

Straight talk about antibiotic use in food-animal production presented by ALPHARMA Inc., Animal Health

January 2006

## WHY THE MEDIA CAN'T GET IT RIGHT

Food consumers—and their retailers—who rely strictly on the news media for information regarding the debate over antibiotic use in agriculture receive a daily helping of poor context, oversimplification and plain old factual mistake. Why can't the press get it right?

■ **They confuse correlation with causation.** If the world's pre-eminent scientists often **make unfounded assumptions** about cause and effect in antibiotic resistance, it shouldn't come as a surprise that reporters and editors follow. Data to prove true causation often either remains unavailable or confuses reporters not trained in science.

■ **They rely too heavily on pet sources.** Dependence on "experts" to explain that confusing science has led to what science novelist Michael Crichton labels a dangerous phenomenon: "**consensus science.**" True scientific breakthroughs, he notes, have historically occurred not by getting all scientists to agree on something, but by the checks and balances of scientific criticism and debate. Reporters either can't or won't do the legwork to uncover scientific critiques of the theory that using antibiotics in animals makes human drugs less effective. That makes them easy pickings for an effective activist PR machine that pitches such consensus science—and the appointed stable of pedigreed sources—as the final word on the issue.

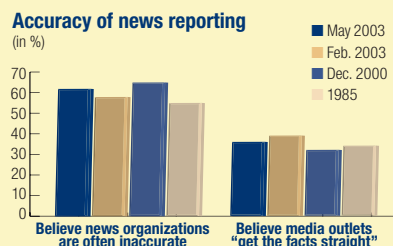
■ **They fall victim to good intentions.** News reporters are human, and like most, they want to improve the world. Their opportunity to improve human health, combined with their ignorance about modern agri-technology, their mistaken assumption that limiting farm antibiotic use will only impact profits and not public health, and sometimes plain lazy reporting leads to stories that start with the assumption that ending the practice is good.

■ **They don't trust science.** One of the 20th Century's best science reporters and now a journalism professor at the University of Maryland, **Jon Franklin**, notes a shift that occurred in science reporting over the past half century. Where post-war science reporters held

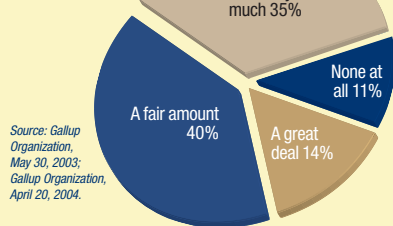
research scientists in nearly the same awe reserved for clergymen, by the '60s and '70s reporters coming out of humanities departments either cared little about science or harbored suspicion about its motives. By the '80s and '90s, that apathy turned into investigative journalism, focused on finding dishonesty and malpractice in studies and their funding. That philosophy can be seen in today's news stories insinuating that scientists who insist on sound science before political action are merely skills for the pharmaceutical industry and agricultural corporations.

*A 2003 Gallup Poll found that more than six in 10 Americans believe news organizations are often inaccurate. Another study showed that almost half don't trust the press and, on average, trust the government more.*

Source: Gallup Poll News Service



### Trust in the media



Source: Gallup Organization, May 30, 2003; Gallup Organization, April 20, 2004.

### Some examples

■ "Roughly 70 percent of total U.S. antibiotics are fed to chickens, pigs and cows simply to make them grow faster." This widely reported error comes from a white paper by the activist group Union of Concerned Scientists. Using "assumptions and informed judgments" rather than manufacturers' data, the report wildly overstates such use, including one antibiotic never even marketed in the United States.

■ "Chickens and pigs are injected with growth hormones." The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which regulates all animal pharmaceuticals, permits no hormones or steroids to be given to chickens. The only hormones used in swine are reproductive hormones which are given, as in humans, to help treat infertility.



### For the Record: Some straight talk about antibiotic use in food production

Antibiotics prevent animal disease and improve meat, milk and egg production. Protecting the ability to use these important, safe and proven tools remains absolutely necessary to meet the world's growing demand for affordable protein. ALPHARMA Inc., Animal Health sponsors this educational series to provide you facts to help set the record straight. *Questions or comments? Contact Steve Kopperud at [skopperud@poldir.com](mailto:skopperud@poldir.com).*

To read archived issues of **For the Record**, go to [www.alpharma.com/ahd](http://www.alpharma.com/ahd).