

# For the Record

Straight talk about antibiotic use in food-animal production

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## CUSTOMERS CHOOSING ANTIBIOTIC-FREE FOOD MAY BE BUYING INTO MORE THAN THEY BARGAIN FOR

*Advocates for banning the farmer's use of antibiotics argue their interests lie only in guarding human drugs' effectiveness. Food consumers who buy that theory may not realize they're also indirectly supporting a long list of more radical causes.*

Many of today's estimated 27,000 anti-agricultural technology and industrialization advocacy groups oppose antibiotic use in farm animals. But often, that opposition is only peripheral to a wider objection to things like anyone but a "family farmer" having the right to own a farm, scientific research and development of biotechnology to improve the productivity of plants and animals, the right of rural land owners to develop their property, free international trade and open markets.

Take, for example, the [Waterkeeper Alliance](#), a New-York-based umbrella for about 80 local river-watch associations. Headed by attorney/activist [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#), Waterkeeper's stable of consulting attorneys, many from the ranks of the tobacco settlement and other environmental litigation, have for years unsuccessfully shopped for judges who would support class-action claims that large hog farms owe damages for polluting — despite no direct evidence any such harm has ever occurred. Kennedy's stated goal is to force modern confined hog production out of business.

In 2002, Waterkeeper also jumped onboard the [Environmental Defense Funds'](#) activity against Bayer for refusing to be bullied into ending the sale of [one of its antibiotics](#) for chickens. Kennedy has since regularly spoken and written against animal antibiotic use. Some of his contentions have

bordered on the absurd — that hogs' legs sometimes break under their own weight because they're fed so many antibiotics (all hogs — antibiotic-fed and antibiotic-free — are grown to roughly the same final weight) and "growth hormones" (the only hormones used on hog farms are, as in humans, occasionally given to female pigs to help treat



infertility).

Where's the connection?

Waterkeeper's strategic logic echoes a means-to-an-end shared by many anti-"factory farm" organizations: They mistakenly believe without benefit of antibiotics, modern industrialized meat, milk and egg production would be forced to an end and return agriculture to simpler times. On the flip side, activists honestly concerned with theoretical public-health questions about antibiotic use link their

message to environmentalist ones like Kennedy's to gain publicity and leverage. That is, frustrated by the public's 30-year-long unwillingness to believe agriculture is to blame for an increasing failure of drugs in humans, they accept environmental and social activism as a means to pump up their numbers and amplify a weak message.

It's activist bait-and-switch that may fool many consumers into unwittingly using their food-buying decision to support deeper social activism they normally would willingly accept no part of.

### Anti-what, exactly?

The high-profile "[Keep Antibiotics Working](#)" campaign receives support in opposing farm-antibiotic use from a collection of groups voicing a disparate collection of beefs from free trade to natural-resource development:

- [Center for Science](#) in the Public Interest
- [Environmental Defense](#)
- [Food Animal Concerns Trust](#)
- [Global Resource Action Center for the Environment](#)
- [Humane Society](#) of the United States
- [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](#)
- [National Catholic Rural Life Conference](#)
- [Natural Resources Defense Council](#)
- [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#)
- [Safe Tables Our Priority](#)
- [Sierra Club](#)
- [Union of Concerned Scientists](#)
- [Waterkeeper Alliance](#)

**Correction:** [May For the Record](#) incorrectly reported one researcher's estimate comparing antibiotic use in humans vs. livestock. It should have said, "Pound for pound, humans, dogs and cats use about 10 times the tonnage of antibiotics in a year that farm animals do."

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### **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.

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