

# For the Record

July 2006

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

## SOMETHING TO SAY? HOW TO MAKE SURE IT'S HEARD

**A**ction against using antibiotics in animals heats up on both the federal and state levels, [well-funded activists](#) continually push their agenda before regulators who may be less than well-informed about the tools of modern food production. If you don't speak up regarding your point of view, the activists will fill the information vacuum that results with theirs.

Making yourself heard needn't be intimidating. Here's how Christopher Kush, author of *The One Hour Activist*, suggests you take advantage of the old-fashioned letter to your representative—still one of the most effective tools:

**FOCUS ON YOUR REPRESENTATIVES.** Saying you're a constituent, Kush believes, trumps just about everything else in getting your letter read.

**DON'T RELY ON FAKE GRASSROOTS.** That includes form letters, canned mailings and "click here to e-mail your representative" Web pages. The likelihood your correspondence will make an impact is in direct proportion to the amount of time you appear to have invested in it. A well-thought, well-written personal letter—penned or typed—stands an infinitely better chance of making an impact beyond simply getting you labeled as a "for" or "against" tick on a tally sheet.

**START AND CONCLUDE YOUR LETTER WITH A SPECIFIC REQUEST.** The narrower, the better. For instance: "Please vote against Congressman Brown's proposed legislation that imposes blanket limits on the food chain's ability to use antibiotic tools, and encourage your peers to do likewise." If you know it, cite a bill number.

**GIVE THEM SOMETHING PERSONAL TO WORK WITH.** Professional lobbyists flood legislators with statistics on the issues, Kush says. What lawmakers long to hear instead are the personal, local aspects of those issues. Write about how many generations have raised animals on your farm—using antibiotics. Detail the hardships even a small increase in meat costs would make to your low-income grocery customers.

**ASK FOR A FOLLOW-UP** letter or call to let you know how the representative stands or votes in regard to your request. Provide full contact information to encourage that contact.

**ENCOURAGE YOUR PEERS TO FOLLOW SUIT.** Because representatives listen first to the people who vote for them, writing anyone but your representatives does little good. Instead, leverage your impact by encouraging others to write to theirs. Try to coordinate the campaign so everyone is making the same, specific request.

**A MODEST CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTION COUNTS HIGHLY** in getting heard. It's unfortunate, Kush says, but it's a fact of life. If you have supported the representative in the past, don't hesitate to point that out in the letter. But—*but*—do not imply that he owes you a vote or support because of that contribution.

**CONSIDER MEETING IN PERSON.** Expressing your position person to person is probably the most effective way to make yourself heard and to make an impact.

### Efficient E-mail

Christopher Kush, author of *The One Hour Activist*, suggests these tips for making e-mails work:

- Get either your town name or the word "constituent" into the subject line. Like, "Nashville constituent against poultry antibiotic ban."
- Put your name and full mailing address in the first line of the e-mail.
- Keep it short. And keep them infrequent.
- Consider e-mail only as follow-up correspondence to an ongoing relationship.
- Don't attach or copy form letters. Take a little time to write in your own words why his action will have a personal and local impact.

### Why you?

It's easy for individuals in the food chain to assume that if they hear about adverse proposed regulations, their professional associations are on top of it. Contact your national organization in any event, advises American [Farm Bureau](#) Director of Public Policy Mary Kay Thatcher.

"The irony is that while legislators rely on us to understand regulatory impacts on farms and the food system, we rely on our members to be our sentinels in the field, to alert us to developments while they're in the early stages and easier to head off. If you're in doubt, don't hesitate to contact us."

Antibiotics prevent animal disease and improve meat, milk and egg production. These important, safe and proven tools remain absolutely necessary to meet the world's growing demand for affordable protein. ALPHARMA Inc., Animal Health sponsors this educational series to provide facts to help set the record straight. [Comments or questions?](#) Contact Steve Kopperud at [skopperud@poldir.com](mailto:skopperud@poldir.com). To read [past issues](#): [www.alpharmaah.com](http://www.alpharmaah.com).