

For the Record

Straight talk about antibiotic use in food-animal production

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FIVE IMPORTANT REASONS YOU *DON'T* WANT FOOD PRODUCERS TO QUIT USING ANTIBIOTICS

Think there's no downside to appeasing the constant negative-publicity machine and supporting an end to using antibiotics for improving health and productivity of food animals? Here are five reasons that would hurt everybody along the food chain:

1 Food would cost more today. Iowa State economist Dermot Hayes, for instance, estimates a ban of antibiotics in swine alone would cost consumers \$748 million per year. Similarly, a National Research Council study estimates banning low-level antibiotic use in all meat production, adjusted for inflation to today's dollars, could cost food consumers an extra \$1.3 to \$2.9 billion per year.

2 Food would cost even more tomorrow. That same NRC study predicted the true costs of a ban would be higher, for at least two reasons. First, it would create a climate of regulatory and market uncertainty that would scare companies away from investing in new technologies. Such disincentive to innovate, NRC believes, might be "one of the most important consequences of a ... ban." A survey of European drug manufacturers shows that exact scenario has occurred in response to antibiotic bans there. Second, any ban likely wouldn't stop at "low-level" antibiotics — those used primarily to make animals grow efficiently. Continuing restrictions on all animal antibiotics would increase their cost, reduce their use by farmers and increase animal disease. All would likely increase the total cost of food in the future.

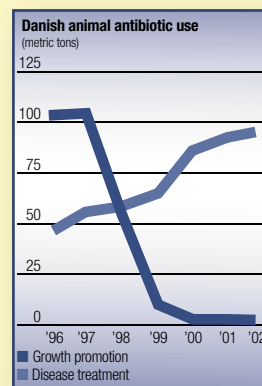
3 Cost would burden the poor disproportionately. Losing use of antibiotics would not price food out of the average consumer's range; however, it would cause

disproportionate hardship on poorer consumers. USDA data show that in contrast to the wealthiest households, which spend only 7 to 8 percent of their income to buy food, the poorest households must spend more than 33 percent. Last year, 3.5 percent of all U.S. households had members who went hungry at some point because they couldn't afford food. And shopping for lowest per-pound cost remains one of the poor consumer's most important economizing weapons, USDA finds.

4 Cost would burden small "family" farmers disproportionately. Because they would be less able to absorb the costs, build new buildings, increase veterinary visits and otherwise change their management to compensate, research suggests, small farmers — not large "factory farms" — would be the first driven out of business by losing access to antibiotics.

5 Food would likely become less safe. And there's the great irony: Because antibiotics — even just at low levels — improve the health of animals, research shows those animals can go into the food chain healthier, carrying lower levels of bacteria that are potential contaminants. One new risk/benefit analysis, for instance, predicts society enjoys a net gain by permitting chicken producers to use one popular antibiotic, because it reduces the cost of foodborne disease far more than any cost of associated antibiotic-resistant disease.

The law of unintended costs: Denmark phased in a ban on continuous low-level drug use for animal "growth promotion" between late 1997 and 2000. That ban kicked off an increase in drug use to



treat disease that has only now leveled off.

Why the paradox? Farmers had to increase antibiotic use to treat additional disease, which had previously been kept under control by the now-forbidden low-level antibiotic use.



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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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