

# For the Record

Straight talk about antibiotic use in food-animal production

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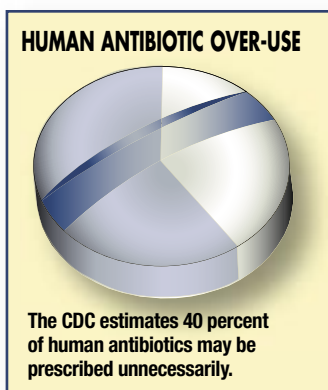
## THE BEST PLACE TO END HUMAN-ANTIBIOTIC FAILURES IS NOT THE MEATCASE. THE TARGET IS MUCH MORE OBVIOUS

*Misguided members of Congress are again pushing to outlaw the safe practice of using antibiotics on farms. Yet they continue to give little more than lip service to fixing human-antibiotic failures at the point which almost everyone agrees the problem arises: the doctor's office.*

Even those who ascribe to the theory — and it remains only theory — that farm antibiotics contribute to human-antibiotic failures concede it's only a small part of the cause. Legislation just reintroduced into Congress in April ignores the overwhelming contribution made by the abuse of human antibiotics at the doctor's office. For instance:

■ Pound for pound, humans use about 10 times the tonnage of antibiotics that farm animals do — much of that unnecessarily. A 1995 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate predicted 40 percent of all prescriptions U.S. doctors wrote were unnecessary. A *Journal of the American Medical Association* study reported that in one year doctors wrote 12 million antibiotic prescriptions for colds, bronchitis and other respiratory infections — 90 percent of which are caused by viruses and thus don't respond to antibiotics. Both the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association recognize such overprescribing and other misuse by humans is nearly the universal cause of today's increase in drug failures.

■ Some more recent studies show that kind of overprescribing in humans, which encourages disease-causing bacteria to develop resistance against antibiotics, may be on the decline. However, the problem is far



from solved. Broad-spectrum antibiotics, for example, are still overused: During the '90s, prescriptions calling for such antibiotics increased from 23 to 40 percent in children and from 24 to 48 percent in adults. The studies suggest doctors may simply be swapping older, narrow-spectrum antibiotics for newer, more expensive, broad-spectrum ones. That means they're now using the antibiotics of last resort first and in the process

beginning to cause those to fail.

■ The World Health Organization — despite its support for limiting farm antibiotic use — suggests the real priorities in reducing human-antibiotic resistance should include:

- Poverty, which leads the poor to misuse antibiotics
- Misdiagnosis and “defensive” prescribing
- Counterfeited drugs
- Misguided demand for antibiotics where they're not needed
- Under-education about how to use antibiotics to prevent resistance
- Filthy hospitals, where resistant germs are routinely spread by workers who don't wash their hands

### **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)

### Progress made

Despite its minor, theoretical role in human-antibiotic failures, the food industry has made voluntary strides to address potential problems:

■ The American Veterinary Medical Association, other vet organizations and the FDA developed a comprehensive set of voluntary “prudent use guidelines.” Veterinarians and producer groups have regularly targeted farmers with the wise-use message; the most recent manifestation, the Pork Board's “Take Care. Use Antibiotics Responsibly” campaign introduced in February.

■ The FDA has introduced new requirements that will make science-based assessment of the risk that an animal drug will contribute to resistance a part of all approvals animal-drug sponsors must submit.

■ USDA also has initiated a program to track antibiotic-resistant bacteria on raw meat.



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