

For the Record

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

ANTIBIOTICS: THE NEXT PAWN IN TRADE NEGOTIATIONS?

Despite the last decade's general increase in global trade, a creeping trend toward politicizing the science of food safety doesn't bode well for export-minded U.S. meat, milk and egg producers. Overseas regulators—in often naked attempts to protect their own livestock producers from competition—are using unscientific standards which could pressure U.S. producers to limit their use of antibiotics, a practice that's been proven safe by testing and decades of use.

REGULATORY AGREEMENTS

Under the World Trade Organization's "Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures," or SPS, member countries maintain their right to set the level of risk they're willing to accept when evaluating another's production practices like antibiotic use. However, they must either honor the SPS scientific standards or—in cases where they elect to set their own—back them up with solid research that demonstrates a legitimate risk really exists. Any regulation must also be proportional to that risk.

Yet SPS standards continue to be used, abused and ignored. Most recently, politicians in six EU member countries were cited by the WTO for ignoring more than 15 years of research showing genetically engineered crops were safe, in order to ban their import. U.S. beef producers won a similar ruling from the WTO in the late 1990s, demanding Europe stop shutting out American beef raised using growth hormones. A decade and a half later, Europe has yet to open its markets to such beef—even as member countries struggle to keep up with the Union's growing demand.

UP NEXT...ANTIBIOTICS?

Considering Europe finalized a ban on its own producers' use of production-level antibiotics in January—which required a similar willingness by politicians to ignore their own scientists' studies that show no demonstrable risk—that practice could be the next trade sticking point similar to beef hormones. The U.S. producer's



Countries that have forbidden antibiotic use by their own producers have resorted to pitching their meat as safer and better than competitors, despite no scientific evidence to support such claims.

use of antibiotics has already come under some scrutiny during trade negotiations. Russia set a series of strict antibiotic residue testing and monitoring standards in 2002 which in many cases exceeded what FDA required for U.S. poultry. Mexico, likewise, rejected tons of pork at the border in late 2002 over concerns about sulfamethazine residues which were later deemed unwarranted.

So far, no formal trade barriers have been erected solely on the basis of concerns that antibiotic use in livestock poses a threat to the effectiveness of human drugs. Yet the question is likely not "if?" but "when?"

David Meeker, an international trade expert with Washington's National Renderer Association, believes we're destined to see such decisions based more and more on social and cultural criteria, involving much wider questions of animal welfare, sustainability and economic impact on rural communities. The science will then be shaped or ignored to fit the decision, he says.

What do we do?

Meeker suggests U.S. producers must:

- Be ready and willing to oppose sanctions that aren't based on good science.
- Insist negotiators build dispute-settlement mechanisms into trade treaties.
- Pressure U.S. regulators to also remain faithful to science. It's hard to convince Europe not to use junk science to bar meat produced with antibiotics when they see U.S. lawmakers introduce equally scientifically *dopey* legislation here.

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 you facts to help set the record straight. [Comments?](#) Contact Steve Kopperud at skopperud@poldir.com. [To read past issues:](#) www.alpharmaah.com.