

For the Record

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

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FOOD CONSUMERS MAY HAVE MISSED THE FINE PRINT ABOUT THIS 'GROUNDBREAKING' ANTIBIOTICS AGREEMENT

When the environmental activist group Environmental Defense blanketed the media in August with the announcement that it had brokered a deal with the nation's largest pork producer to cut antibiotic use, a few of the fine points may have gotten lost in translation.

The country's largest contract food-service company, **Compass Group North America**, announced it would stop buying pork in which certain antibiotics have been used for growth promotion. Compass' top supplier—and the largest U.S. hog producer—Smithfield Foods' policy on antibiotic use fit the Compass "requirements." Here are some points consumers probably didn't read about this "groundbreaking" agreement:

■ **Compass' policy** will continue to overlook antibiotics given to pigs "whose caretakers reasonably believe are at imminent risk of becoming ill"—that is, in cases where it's shown a disease is present on-farm or reasonably likely.

The exemption **underscores a point** that one team of scientists noted last year in the *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*: The clear

distinction between such unacceptable "subtherapeutic" use and acceptable "non-routine disease prevention" is a paper one, not necessarily a physical one. Proof in point: When Denmark banned growth-promotion use in swine, therapeutic antibiotic use jumped 30 to 40 percent to treat animals that, minus preventive antibiotics, subsequently fell ill.

The fact is of the 23 animal-feed antibiotics approved in the United States, only two are labeled solely for growth

promotion. The Animal Health Institute, based on surveys of the makers of animal drugs, estimates the percentage of all U.S. antibiotics that go strictly to promote growth or efficiency in food animals is only about 6 percent.

■ Environmental Defense rushed to announce the Compass deal just three news cycles after **FDA ruled** it was ordering the controversial chicken antibiotic enrofloxacin

off the market, citing concerns it could be making human drugs less effective. Yet **Smithfield's policy** of limited antibiotic use—which will remain unchanged—is years old already. It is based on voluntary prudent-use guidelines developed for farmers by livestock and veterinary organizations.

■ Even though the agreement was positioned as the free

market giving consumers what they want, Environmental Defense continues to **pressure both FDA and Congress** to outlaw most of the drugs now used in animals.

"Activist groups may couch their fear campaigns in the language of consumer choice," the **Hudson Institute's Alex Avery** says, "but they do not believe consumers should have real choice. They continue to spread misinformation and target producers and food retailers they view as vulnerable."



Environmental Defense now begins phase 2: Encouraging followers to flood Compass with praise, which can then be used to demonstrate "market support" to Compass competitors.

Partners, but in what?

Environmental Defense's **Alliance Program** aims to partner with corporations like Smithfield to "help them" redesign their practices to support ED's vision of environmental correctness, according to program director Gwen Ruta. The conciliatory tone masks but doesn't change ED's nature:

■ Washington conservative think tank **Capital Research Center** ranks ED a No. 2 on an eight-point scale, with a one reserved for the most radically left-wing groups.

■ ED advocates severe restrictions on ranching and other uses of public lands.

■ It supports tough permitting and planning restrictions on livestock operations, including outright bans on manure-holding lagoons, as well as moratoriums on farm expansions.



For more on the Compass deal and to read archived issues of *For the Record*, go to www.alpharma.com/ahd

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