

For the Record

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

RELENTING TO 'ANTIBIOTIC-FREE' COULD COST MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

It's a tough decision, deciding whether it's cost-effective to pursue the shifting natural/organic/raised-without/sustainable trends. Some may be pressing you to plunge into stocking "antibiotic-free" meat, milk and eggs, saying there's no risk. But it's critical that food providers understand all the long-term ramifications. The "raised without" claim may have some marketability, but make no mistake: It is *not* grassroots consumer demand at work. It was invented by activists to help achieve political goals. These groups create the appearance of consumer demand, then manipulate the retailer to further foster those political aims.

So, if you ally your operation with that segment to chase some short-term dollars, it's important to understand some of the other valuable food technologies that may next fall victim to those same politics. What would elimination of these targeted tools mean to your bottom line?

OXYGEN-LIMITED PACKAGING

Some of the same activist groups behind the move to eliminate farm antibiotic use have also pushed the U.S. Food & Drug Administration to limit or ban your ability to stock meat carried in oxygen-limited packaging. Such packaging has been a boon to the now-estimated \$10 billion case-ready meat segment, sparing part of the \$1 billion retailers lose yearly from marking down or pitching meat that, although perfectly safe, is no longer attractive enough to move. Case-ready has kept many small grocers in the meat business. Yet the activist group [Safe Tables Our Priority](#) (STOP), a founding member of the [Keep Antibiotics Working](#) (KAW) coalition to ban farm antibiotic use, led a high-profile media campaign late last year to force FDA to move against the practice.

CHLORINE IN PROCESSING

Though spared intense U.S. media scrutiny so far, use of chlorine-containing compounds has come under fire in Europe, where poultry processors face higher disease levels in chick-



Is that consumer demand for "antibiotic-free" meat, milk and eggs really the free market at work, or is it political activism leveraging a consumer segment?

ens—perhaps because Europe acquiesced to the very antibiotic bans being urged here. Chlorine use, almost universal in U.S. processing as a disinfectant, has been questioned based on concern about its cancer-causing possibility and danger to employees—in addition to the communal bath processing system it makes possible. Even the next best alternative is approximately five times more costly.

ANIMAL HANDLING TECHNOLOGIES

Virtually all the special interest groups actively pressing for an end to farm antibiotic use also have an animal welfare interest. Thus, many are active in the movement to limit traditional animal handling methods, particularly in chickens. The [Humane Society of the United States](#) (HSUS), another KAW founder, sued USDA two years ago to require poultry plants to handle birds pre-slaughter in the same manner they handle livestock. Such restrictions would vastly magnify chicken prices, while—ironically—increasing the chances birds could suffer.

"Activist groups may couch their fear campaigns in the language of consumer choice," says long-time critic Alex Avery, of the Hudson Institute, "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."

CHECK INTO SOME ACTIONS YOU'RE REALLY SUPPORTING

Activists with much broader aims than ensuring safe food have successfully grafted their [ulterior agendas](#) to the "antibiotic-free" movement. The movement to end farm antibiotic use began not with consumers, but with these and other activist groups. Do they *really* hold your interest at heart?

Center for a Livable Future.

This Johns Hopkins University-affiliated critic of all but small-scale "urban" farming also supports the "Meatless Monday" campaign to scare consumers into cutting—even eliminating—their meat purchasing.

Global Resource Action Center for the Environment.

GRACE targets not only modern agriculture through its "[Factory Farm](#)" project, but also traditional energy production and internal combustion automobiles as being too favorable to "corporate profits." GRACE has mastered the method of mobilizing local agitation to lobby regulators, and urges consumers frustrated with slow progress by their supermarkets in offering "local" food to apply the same pressure to them.

Center for Science in the

Public Interest. Another founding contributor to the cease-antibiotics campaign, CSPI has a long, dubious track record of lobbying for cost-boosting food-service regulations, including banning trans fats, regulating salt as hazardous, mandating nutrition information on menus, and restricting youth access to vending machines.

Environmental Defense Fund.

Though the 300,000-member environmental-activist group dresses itself up as a "[partner](#)" in [helping businesses](#) improve their sustainability, many of its dictates are painfully costly to small business, such as the recent restrictions on diesel-driven generators many supermarkets are forced to rely upon for cooling.

For more about this subject:

www.AntibioticTruths.com/fttr/fttr_apr02.pdf

retailer FAQs about the realities of organic food production

Why shouldn't food retailers agree to provide organic meat, milk and eggs? We're all being urged to do our part to ensure the "sustainability" of the food system, aren't we?

Yes, the food chain should always examine its practices to look for ways to help the environment and meet the needs of today's consumers without sacrificing the needs of tomorrow's.

But here's the problem with the wholesale abandonment of technology suggested by the organic activists, writes Dennis Avery, author of *Saving the Planet with Pesticides and Plastic: The Environmental Triumph of High-Yield Farming*.

- U.S. farmers use about 11 million tons of industrially created nitrogen yearly to maintain soil fertility. Replacing that input to go all-organic would require the manure of about 1 billion additional cattle. Those animals would require another 2 billion acres to feed. That's roughly the entire continental United States.
- Free-ranging the entire U.S. hog herd would require an area of land roughly the size of Pennsylvania. The U.S. chicken flock would require New Jersey.

Those and other Inconvenient Truths about organic farming just led the United Nations

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to issue a statement declaring it does not endorse organic agriculture as a solution to world hunger. Organics' higher prices can help boost some farmers' incomes, FAO said, but the limited productivity of organic compared to conventional farming shows, "the potential of organic agriculture is far from large enough to feed the world."



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Feel like there's no risk in stocking "antibiotic-free?"

□ The "growing market demand" for meat, milk and eggs raised without antibiotics masks underlying political aims that could risk other production tools and, ultimately, your economic well-being.

□ When you stock antibiotic-free products, you support the political activism of a coalition of special interests. But do they really support your long term prosperity? Check out a few examples.

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For the Record is a regular publication designed to present facts to balance today's debate over the use of safe, effective, economical methods farmers use to produce your milk, meat and eggs.

Read past issues or link to more information on this issue at www.AntibioticTruths.com

For the Record

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Dear Food Chain Partner:

We know you're caught in a tough spot. Fragmentation of the consumer market continues, you're pressured to be all things to all people, and you're tasked with improving your "sustainability" — if anyone can even agree on what that means in the real world. We realize that all of us in the long, complex chain that starts at the farm and ends at the plate must work together to continue to provide today's shoppers the qualities in food they value — at a miraculous 11 percent of their average disposable income. Cannibalizing one another in that chain won't ensure long term health for anyone, including our consumers.

Many of the most vocal voices pushing elimination of antibiotics in producing your meat, milk and egg supplies don't share that devotion. They may talk the talk about "meeting consumer demand," but some simple research into the political and social dimensions of their activism reveals some deeper motives that, frankly speaking, should be nothing short of alarming to anyone attempting to run and succeed in a business today. The science does not support claims that using less efficient technology to produce food offers any benefit to consumer health. If it did, we would be first in line to support change. Want to learn more? See www.antibiotictruths.com.