

For the Record

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

THE SALMONELLA SCARE BANDWAGON IS GETTING CROWDED...AND DECEPTIVE

The two massive nationwide *Salmonella*-related outbreaks in the last year—in peppers and in peanuts—which sickened more than an estimated 2,000 consumers and cost the food chain hundreds of millions in recall and other costs, brought a predictable reaction from anti-agriculture activists opposed to using antibiotics to produce food.

MSNBC considered it confoundingly newsworthy that virtually all those afflicted were ultimately successfully treated for the disease, digging up sources who would go on record to say, yes, antibiotics did not fail to work...but that, OK, they possibly could, perhaps, in the future—sometime. A commentary in the *New England Journal of Medicine* by a Wisconsin physician recommended animal agriculture “vigorously pursue” its duty to protect consumers by using all tools available to reduce the levels of potential foodborne pathogens in animals. Meanwhile, inexplicably, in the same paragraph he recommends farmers quit certain uses of medications in animals—a practice that has been shown by research to do exactly what he lectures farmers to do. (For

more, see the August 2008 issue of For the Record, at www.AntibioticTruths.com.)

An event that can be as potentially devastating to food retailers as the recalls you’ve just gone through is no time to play fast and loose with the science. *Salmonella*, one of the most infectious food-borne pathogens affecting humans, has frustrated science’s attempts to understand how and why it causes disease. For instance, University of California researchers published a study late last year showing the individual strains that cause human disease—out of the 2,300 known strains—are genetically distinct from *Salmonella* strains obtained from animals. The fact *Salmonella* may adapt differently in the human intestine than it does in the animal intestine may explain several mysteries about the organism—in particular why antibiotic resistance patterns in animals don’t mirror resistance patterns in humans, and vice-versa.

Controlling food-borne *Salmonella* is a serious responsibility. But using it to focus political pressure on antibiotic use does nothing to accomplish that aim.



NEVER LET A GOOD CRISIS GO TO WASTE?

Back-to-back ad campaigns from the PEW Charitable Trusts tried to implicate pig farm antibiotic use first in 2008’s *Salmonella* outbreak in peppers and tomatoes and then in the recent peanut product recalls. Just one problem: It’s wrong. Most human *Salmonella* case isolates don’t come from pigs, and most never require medication to cure. The campaign is purely a hypothetical smoke screen.

IN YOUR BEST INTEREST?

Supermarket industry analysts have observed that as the economy has darkened, consumers are turning to local grocers for a measure of reassurance. One phenomenon capitalizing on that trend is the “local” food movement—sourcing food from farmers and ranchers living nearby (leaving

aside momentarily the definition of “nearby:” One New York specialty retailer considers Iowa to be a local purchase.) Local sourcing has proven to be a good niche for some retailers. In fact, it may be elbowing aside “raised without” antibiotics/hormone claims, and even organic, as the new stamp of authenticity and reassurance that food is safer (though unproven and likely false).

However, locally raised is a double-edged sword that may prove to be the tiger local grocers can’t easily dismount once they jump on to it. Why?

At heart, the local food and “community-supported agriculture” movements don’t permit a valid role for food chain middlemen, including you. The 4,700 active farmers’ markets and 1,500 community-supported farms USDA now

tallies are widely promoted not as suppliers to local grocers, but as safer and healthier replacements.

“If you really want to be sure your food is healthy and safe,” writes New York Times best-selling author Dr. Joseph Mercola, “you might want to try avoiding grocery stores altogether....”

“...in the long run, you’d be better off getting organic food from a farmers’ market or a [community-supported agriculture subscription],” Dr. Mercola says.

Britain’s most vocal local advocate, Anthony Davison, agrees. He uses his online gateway to some 7,100 direct-sale farms to convince shoppers traditional supermarkets are a bad buy.

“We have got so used to supermarkets saying they are cheaper, that we believe them,” he says. “It’s actually a load of crap.”



BE CAREFUL THE PROMISES YOUR PRODUCT OFFERINGS MAKE

Responding to consumers frightened by *Salmonella*-related food recalls may tempt you to turn up the volume on your organic and natural category marketing. Think twice.

Problem No. 1 is this: **No scientific evidence** exists to support a message that eating organic or natural makes any significant improvement in your customers' health—with the possible sole exception of a “placebo” effect that might improve their mental health. The continuing dawning of this reality among consumers could explain why organic loyalty appears to be waning as the economy has soured.

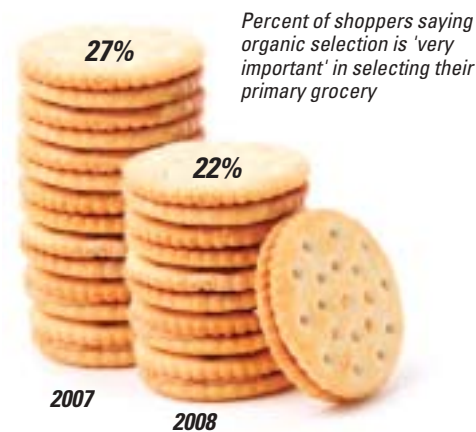
But the deeper issue No. 2 for retailers is this: Why go to the trouble? As market analysts have noted, your die-hard organic consumers typically buy organic for **reasons beyond health**.

They buy in order to feel more connected to their community and to local farmers. If that's true, attempting to over-rationalize such a vague, emotional issue by heaping on health-touting “raised without antibiotic” and “all natural” product claims simply confuses the trait: People want to buy authentic food which their local, community-focused grocer can stand behind and they can feel good about buying.

Contradicting that message by making organic and sustainability claims that don't hold up under scrutiny poses a real threat to your credibility, IGA President and CEO Mark Batenic recently warned grocers.

“If we don't do that correctly, we could be in big trouble,” Batenic said. “It's easy to lose trust. Very easy.”

THE WANING DRAW OF ORGANIC



Source: National Grocers Association 2009 Consumer Panel Survey.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Why attempts to link recent *Salmonella* recalls and animal antibiotics are stretching the truth thin:

- ❑ Antibiotics used in food animals were not related to recent *Salmonella* outbreaks.
- ❑ Customers who want to “eat local” in the mistaken notion it protects against *Salmonella* poisoning may seem a promising niche market. But ultimately the proponents of local food are no friend of the local food retailer.

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FAQs about the hypothetical hazard of antibiotic resistance in food poisoning

Q Isn't it true giving antibiotics to farm animals is to blame for the food recalls due to contamination with bacteria like *Salmonella*?

A Despite what you may have seen in the media, the use of medications in animals is a separate issue from the outbreaks of illness like those that prompted *Salmonella* recalls. For instance:

■ Claims that feeding antibiotics to swine makes it more likely food consumers will suffer untreatable cases of *Salmonella* poisoning are wrong. The strains of *Salmonella* found in recent outbreaks were either not resistant to antibiotics or were types rarely found in food animals.

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■ We now know that the 2007 *E. coli* contamination of bagged lettuce that sickened 200 people and killed three originated not with “confined animal feeding operation” cattle eating medicated corn-based diets, as activists predicted. It came from a **small herd of grass-fed cattle**.

■ A study last year by Rhode Island's Providence Hospital found a random sample of meats from 10 metro supermarkets and butcher shops **contained no bacteria** that were drug resistant. In particular, the researchers found no instances of MRSA in the samples they tested, according to the study published in the *Journal of Food, Agriculture & Environment*.

For the Record is a regular publication designed to present facts to balance today's debate over the 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