

For the Record

Straight talk about antibiotic use in food-animal production
Volume 4, Issue 2

Sponsored by ALPHARMA Inc. Animal Health
April 2005

MEDIA RELATIONS THAT GET YOUR STORY HEARD

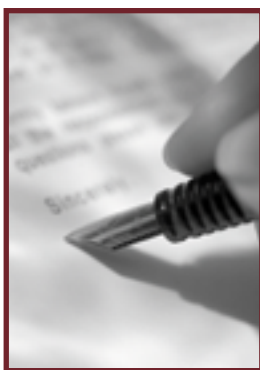
Take up a pen and join the revolution

Among those who make watching the media their business, many believe we are in the middle of nothing short of an era change: The century-long monopoly "Old Media" held on news dissemination and discussion is crumbling. Hairline cracks first opened when news consumers began questioning the objectivity of their news after CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite openly opposed U.S. involvement in Vietnam almost 40 years ago. Today the trumpets have blown outside the walls in the form of recent scandals surrounding old-line news organizations' naked bias. In the process, it's shaken at least three of the temple's pillars — CBS' Dan Rather, CNN chief news executive Eason Jordan, and *New York Times* Executive Editor Howell Raines.

Out in FlyoverCountry, where real news tends more to weather and The Illini, this coastline revolution may seem a fight in which we have no dog. Yet for food producers concerned with protecting their proven safe practice of using antibiotics to produce meat, milk and eggs in the midst of relentless — often ill-informed — news coverage, the change offers revolutionary opportunity.

The Internet-driven New Media revolution has suddenly flipped the pit-pump switch on what was once a pretty anaerobic process. Today, anyone with an Internet connection and a working knowledge of **search engines** can immediately spot the pattern of identical

words and phrases popping up in newspapers separated by 1,000 miles — a pattern that immediately signals the news "reporters" have relied on an **activist's press release** to feed them their news. He can quickly discover



the backgrounds and previous words of a quoted "**health authority**," who in reality works for an activist group opposing technological farming.

More importantly, with only slightly more effort, he can drop a quick note to the advertising manager of the local station, asking why — in the heart of farm country — he's placing his advertisers in the uncomfortable position of promoting a "health" web site like **meatlessmonday.com**, a disguised front for **anti-agriculture**

activists. Or he can e-mail the local paper's publisher, asking why his subscription check must go toward purchasing a twice-weekly **syndicated pet doctor** column written by a **disguised animal activist** who has previously suggested animals' rights are equal to humans' and that our treatment of animals somehow earned the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

This revolution in media transparency and accountability is a lesson not lost on the activists who oppose your use of technology and capitalism to help feed the world. They have turned it into an artform, as you'll see inside. It's art you, too, can learn and apply to protect your rights to pursue your livelihood.

Also in this issue:

- **In the spirit of fire fights fire, here are some tactics you can learn from activist groups aligned against you to protect yourself**
- **A case study in poor news reporting that results when you don't make your side heard**

MYTH-BUSTER AMMUNITION TO FIGHT BACK

The best of the worst: An activist reading list

Want to learn from some of the best? Hold your nose and check these handbooks:

■ ***The One-Hour Activist: The 15 Most Powerful Actions You Can Take to Fight for the Issues and Candidates You Care About.*** A good outline of the model activists use first to get attention from regulators and then to keep the pressure on them.

■ ***MoveOn's 50 Ways to Love Your Country: How to Find Your Political Voice and Become a Catalyst for Change.*** A basic outline from the new masters of Internet spin and fund-raising, MoveOn.org.

■ ***Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy: Manual for Activists.*** Now in its third edition, this decade-old workbook has been used as a textbook at Harvard, Johns Hopkins and others.

Note: Find it hard to bring yourself to support some of these organizations by buying their book? Most are available used at www.amazon.com

For the record

The waning monopoly of the traditional media has opened opportunities for you to make your side heard. Take some tips from the masters of the craft: the activist groups.

For the record

To make your message effective, learn from the activists:

Make it personal, keep it local, and communicate human values.

Fighting fire with fire: Lessons from Activist PR 101

Nobody's mastered use of the new media better than the anti-technology, anti-agriculture activist groups, most of whom regularly scare or entice the media into promoting one aspect of their message: Government must stop your ability to use antibiotics. In

GRACE to help them frustrate farm startups and expansion through zoning hearings. By hiding behind the local face, GRACE provides expertise without giving the distasteful appearance of being an outside agitator.

It's a common activist strategy that can be easily turned against them. Whenever you get the chance to defend agriculture and your production practices, start your defense with the positive impact you make on your neighbors — and the negative consequences that would occur by following the lead of unwelcome outsiders.



Activist groups win the communication battle against agriculture by putting human faces on their message.

Keep your friends close...

Perhaps one of the most powerful tools the Internet revolution has created is the almost instant ability to connect beyond that local level. Activist attacks are often seen as focusing on a specific business, industry or technology. Yet those focused attacks are almost always just one prong of a multiple network of activist causes.

Case in point: Current participants in the Keep Antibiotics Working campaign. Although that network includes obvious groups like Center for Science in the Public Interest, Food Animal Concerns Trust, Safe Tables Our Priority, and Physicians for Social Responsibility, the list of supporters also includes such less obviously anti-antibiotic-use groups as the Sierra Club, Environmental Defense, the Humane Society of the United States, and even the National Catholic Rural Life Conference.

That odd but effective coupling occurs, according to Canadian public relations consultant Ross Irvine, because activist groups like these have both an affinity — and perhaps more importantly — a willingness to work together with associations that don't represent their primary goals, but can nevertheless move them forward.

And in unfortunate contrast to that activist network that's "extensive, intense, and dense," Irvine says, agriculture too often tries to too narrowly explain or defend only a single business, industry or technology.

What's needed, he counsels, is equal work and willingness on the part of agricultural organizations to actively recruit networks that reach far beyond just crossing species boundaries — a move that itself was taboo until only about 10 years ago. Producers and their organizations must link with all agriculture producers and suppliers, as well as outdoor sports groups, chambers of commerce, business development groups, mining interests, timber interests, wise-resource-use groups, biotechnology concerns, human pharmaceutical representatives — any group that has even a passing interest in protecting science-based decision-making, economic development, consumer freedom and free enterprise.

...But keep your enemies closer

Another benefit of today's Internet-based activism is it

the spirit of fire fights fire, here are some tactics you can learn from them to protect yourself:

Make it all personal

People relate to people, and they relate to symbols. Activists understand this concept when they solicit first-hand horror stories about food poisoning and antibiotic resistance, when they seek out and provide personal stories to reporters and editors, and when they emphasize the personal toll that can result to anyone from a human case of disease that resists treatment.

Understanding the facts about antibiotic use and food production is important. But relying simply on fact won't inspire consumers to your side. Instead, you have to learn to out-symbolize the activists. Think:

- Making food affordable for working families.
- Improving the health and well-being of baby pigs, doe-eyed calves and fluffy chicks.
- Protecting family farmers and the small businesses they support, helping keep them in the community.

Make it all local

All politics are local, the old saying goes, and activist groups have mastered the strategy of gathering global information and expertise via the Internet, but customizing its application to local issues, business and faces.

The anti-technological farming group Global Resource Action Center for the Environment, for instance, has in the past solicited citizens to invite

Write an effective letter

The old-fashioned letter to Congress remains one of the most effective tools to make yourself heard, says Christopher Kush, author of *The One Hour Activist* — if you remember these tips:

■ **Start with your representatives.** The unfortunate reality, Kush believes, is that being able to flash an address within an elected rep's district trumps about everything else when it comes to getting your letter read.

■ **Don't rely on fake grassroots.** That includes form letters, canned mailings and "click here to e-mail your congressman" web pages. The likelihood your correspondence will make an impact is in direct proportion to the amount of time you appear to have invested in it. A well-thought, well-written personal letter — hand written or typed — stands an infinitely better chance of making an impact beyond simply becoming a "for" or "against" tick on a tally sheet.

■ **Start and conclude your letter with a specific request.** The narrower, the better. For instance: "Please vote against Congressman Brown's proposed legislation that imposes blanket limits on our ability to use antibiotics in food

production, and encourage your peers to do likewise." Whenever possible, cite the bill number you're referring to.

■ **Give your representative something personal to work with.** Professional lobbyists flood Congress with statistics on the issues, Kush says. What legislators long to hear instead are the personal, local aspects of those issues. Write about how many generations have raised animals on your farm — using antibiotics. Detail the specific personal cost losing that ability would mean to you and your community.

■ **Ask for a follow-up to let you know how the congressman stands or votes in regard to your request.** Provide full contact information to encourage that contact.

■ **Encourage your peers to follow suit.** Because congressmen listen to the people who vote for them first, copying your letter to more than your representatives does little good. Instead, leverage your impact by encouraging others to write to theirs. Try to coordinate the campaign so everyone is making the same, specific request.

■ **Consider meeting in person.** It's probably the most effective way to make yourself heard and have an impact.

has enabled more transparency about not only activists' beliefs, goals and tactics, but their funding sources, as well. Most offer organizational news via their web site or newsletter. Make it a habit to subscribe, read and search the Internet for more information on key points that emerge, Irvine suggests.

Spread the gospel

Activists succeed because they're passionate about their cause, and because they infect the masses with that passion — they "communicate values" as Irvine puts it. And they communicate in values-speak that gives them the high moral ground — protecting human

health, guarding the environment, defending children — while making us appear to be mercenary, cold, heartless and driven purely by self-interest. At the same time, they make no attempt to appease or co-exist with the cause they oppose. With a zeal that borders on the religious, they aim to stamp out what they oppose, not learn to build a workable relationship with it.

Public relations and advocacy communication aren't rocket science, Irvine says. The basic skills are all easy to find. What will win the fight for preserving our way of business — and make no mistake, it is nothing short of that — will be our willingness and ability to work the public the way the activists do.

Effective polarity

They say...

Misuse of antibiotics threatens to plunge us into a medical Dark Ages.

Antibiotic resistance threatens the health of cancer patients, premature babies and senior citizens.

Unknown consequences of antibiotic use in animals are turning every consumer into an experimental petri dish.

Antibiotics in livestock waste could threaten the environment.

You say...

Innovative livestock production has opened a golden age of affordable protein for the poorest consumers.

Economic supplies of high-quality protein and calcium have reduced childhood malnutrition, prevented widespread iron deficiency in women and helped prevent crippling osteoporosis in elderly women.

The most risky diet is one that scares consumers away from adequate supplies of protein and calcium from meat, milk and eggs.

Requiring thousands more acres to grow the additional feed we would need to raise animals without antibiotics would reduce wild habitats and forests.

For the record

As much as we'd like to, we cannot win the consumer's favorable opinion by communicating science alone.

For the Record

For the Record, sponsored by a grant from ALPHARMA, is designed to help unite the industry and provide a unified, rational message on behalf of producers whose freedom to use safe, effective, economical production methods is at stake. Working together, we can set the record straight on antibiotics. Questions or comments? Contact Steve Kopperud at skopperud@poldir.com. Want to read past issues or link to more information on this issue? Visit us online at www.alpharma.com/ahd/For_The_Record

Listen up: This is not about science

The difficult reality is that if antibiotic use in food animals were strictly a scientific issue, we wouldn't be facing the problems we are. Because many of us are scientists or trained in science, we



Eric Gonder, DVM
Senior Staff Veterinarian
Goldsboro Milling Co.

assume talking about science will carry the day here. It won't.

Refuting activist propaganda by sticking only to science is basically fruitless, even when it can be done in a timely manner — and it usually can't be if research is needed. We must not forget that the goal of activists presenting scientific information is not to further scientific truth, but to influence public opinion to achieve activist objectives. It is not a scientific debate, and continuing the

dialogue in that form alone is inappropriate and dangerous. If we lose the battle for public opinion, science becomes moot — we must respond in a way that serves both the purposes of public dialogue and of science.

We must make science work for us in getting out the message of what could happen to the public — what will happen — without access to antibiotics. That's a story that can move.

Those of us in production agriculture must be agile in communicating the consequences of the larger attack on efficiency from those who oppose "factory farming" for whatever reason. That will move the argument away from the scientific details of antibiotic use which many consumers will find hard to understand or tedious, and back to the social and public-policy implications which get and hold those consumers' (and voters') attention. Some examples:

■ How much environmental damage will be caused by reducing production efficiency simply to cater to the development of fashionable boutique foods?

■ How many people will have to go hungry when we try to feed today's population using farming practices of 40 years ago?

■ How many animals will suffer needless disease in the name of avoiding some unproven risk to human health?

We must be ready and willing to describe the environmental, economic, social and cultural effects of what's happening. As convinced as we are of the science, we must learn to talk to our public in the language and values they choose, not the ones we're most comfortable with. Using their lack of science as permission to stay above the fray will only allow the opposition to plaster us day after day as environmental and social monsters.

MEDIA RELATIONS THAT GET YOUR MESSAGE HEARD

A case study: What happens when you're not heard

The Jan. 15 issue of the medical journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* reported a study from University of California at Berkeley's School of Public Health. The study concluded an outbreak of antibiotic-resistant urinary-tract infections in women at several university hospitals in late 1999 and early 2000 "potentially [had] an animal origin," in the words of the study authors.

The news that seemingly innocent statement turned into offers an object lesson in how simple activity from anti-farming activists, coupled with inaction on our part, leaves a vacuum of information that fills up with their story, not ours:

- At least 21 radio or TV stations nationwide, two wire services, and six health-related publications reported the story within two weeks after the study's release. In keeping with the media's tendency to soundbite and thus oversimplify complex issues, most ended up stretching the wording of the study to something similar to this sample from Minneapolis: "... antibiotics given to animals that humans eat is making it more difficult for doctors to treat urinary-tract infections in women."
- At least seven of those reports quoted or interviewed Dr. Margaret Mellon, although she was in no way associated with the study or UC-Berkeley. Instead, Mellon is Food and Environment Program Director for the activist Union of Concerned Scientists. Her interviews were provided by the public relations agency for [Keep Antibiotics Working](#), another activist group to which UCS contributes.
- None of the reports explored questions regarding the study's conclusion, including:
 - None of 495 bacterial specimens collected from animals over a 37-year period and then compared to the bacteria isolated from the sick women were identical when tested with the recognized "gold-standard" of molecular typing. The closest match, at 94 percent similar — and upon which the study conclusion was made — was collected from a cow more than a decade before the outbreak.
 - No epidemiological evidence explored a common food source.
 - No information was presented regarding what antibiotics, if any, that cow was given.
- None of the news stories mentioned an [editorial commentary](#) immediately following the journal article, written by University of Washington Professor of Medicine [Thomas M. Hooton](#). Hooton said that although he agreed with the premise of the Berkeley study, the authors' evidence had failed to prove their conclusion. Hooton said only one publication had contacted him regarding the study or his commentary: *For the Record*.