

NEWS RELEASE

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REPORT: Most Fast Food Chains Get Poor Grades for Overuse of Antibiotics in Beef *“Biggest Wannabe” Award Goes to Wendy’s; McDonald’s Gets “Biggest Moover”*

New York: Most top fast food chains in the United States continue to sell beef produced with routine antibiotic use, earning them poor grades in the fifth annual *Chain Reaction* scorecard released today by six major consumer, public health and environmental organizations. This is a stark contrast to the stunning antibiotic success story that has unfolded across the chicken industry in the past decade, driven in large part by meaningful policies adopted by fast food companies.

“Set against the backdrop of the huge progress made in the chicken industry, this year’s report paints a dismal picture for beef,” said **Blair Horner, Executive Director, NYPIRG**. “Preserving life-saving antibiotics should be the bottom line for major beef buyers like Wendy’s.”

Leading public health experts have long warned that curbing overuse of these drugs in livestock is essential to combating the growing epidemic of antibiotic-resistant infections in people and animals. In the absence of federal action, leadership in the marketplace is critical to solving this problem.

The report was produced by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University, Consumer Reports, Food Animal Concerns Trust, Center for Food Safety, and U.S. PIRG Education Fund, NYPIRG’s national partner.

SUPERLATIVES

For the first time this year the groups recognized companies for significant progress, leadership and foot-dragging with the following superlatives:

- **BIGGEST WANNABE: Wendy’s.** The nation’s third-largest burger chain has made only a token gesture toward addressing the problem in its beef supply chain. It has cut the use of just one of more than two dozen medically important antibiotics approved for use in the cattle industry by just 20%, and in just 30% of its beef supply.
- **BIGGEST MOOVER: McDonald’s.** The largest beef purchaser in the world, McDonald’s had no policy for antibiotics use in beef until last December when it committed to curtailing routine medically important antibiotic use across its vast global supply chain and set concrete reduction targets by the end of 2020.
- **EARLY LEADERS: Chipotle and Panera.** These were the first two major national chains to address antibiotics in their meat supplies. Both currently serve only beef raised without the routine use of antibiotics.
- **BEST BURGER JOINTS: BurgerFi and Shake Shack.** While these restaurants were not graded in this year’s report because they are not among the overall top restaurant chains in the

country, they earned this recognition for being the two largest U.S. *burger* chains already implementing strong policies. These companies exclusively serve responsibly raised beef across all of their restaurants. They both also posted higher year-over-years sales from 2017 to 2018, confirming better beef is a win for the bottom line.

“We’re seeing mostly baby steps when it comes to reducing the massive overuse of antibiotics in the beef industry. When you consider that our ability to treat life-threatening infections is at stake, it’s clear we need to take big leaps forward,” **said Matt Wellington, Antibiotics Campaign Director with the U.S. PIRG Education Fund.** “Major beef buyers like Wendy’s can help accelerate the shift away from using our life-saving medicines as a crutch for industrial beef production.”

GRADES

The report also graded the top fast food restaurants nationwide on the antibiotic use policies and practices behind the beef served in their restaurants.

Top performers were Chipotle (A) and Panera (A-), which earned grades in the “A” range for the fifth year in a row.

They were followed by McDonald’s (C) and Subway (C). Like McDonald’s, Subway has strong policies on the books, but has yet to begin implementing them.

Wendy’s (D+) earned a grade in the “D” range for the second year in a row. Meanwhile, Taco Bell received a “D” for taking a minor step in the right direction with a commitment to reduce medically important antibiotics by 25% by 2025.

The remaining chains graded on the scorecard received an “F” because they have not established policies restricting antibiotic use in their beef supply chains: Arby’s, Applebee’s, Buffalo Wild Wings, Burger King, Chili’s, Dairy Queen, Domino’s Pizza, IHOP, Jack in the Box, Little Caesars, Olive Garden, Panda Express, Pizza Hut, Sonic and Starbucks.

Background

A new estimate puts the death toll from antibiotic-resistant infections in the U.S. at more than 160,000 deaths a year, which would make it the [fourth leading cause of death](#) in the country.

Nearly two-thirds of antibiotics that are important for human medicine are currently sold for use in livestock, not people. The cattle industry consumes more than any other meat sector.

These drugs are routinely given to healthy cattle as poor compensation for inappropriate diets and the stressful, crowded and unsanitary conditions on industrial feedlots. This practice hastens the spread of antibiotic resistance in bacteria and increases the risk of drug-resistant infections in people.

In contrast to beef, over 90% of chicken sold in the U.S. last year was produced without the routine use of antibiotics considered medically important by the FDA. Much of the positive change in chicken production has happened in the past five years. The fast food industry—under pressure from consumers and the groups behind the Chain Reaction scorecard—has been a driving force behind that progress.

A 2018 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 1,014 adults found that 78% of respondents agreed that meat producers should stop giving antibiotics to animals that aren’t sick. Fifty-nine percent said they would be more likely to eat at a restaurant that serves meat raised without antibiotics.

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2019 Scorecard: Restaurant antibiotic use policies and practices

A

B

C

D+

F

How top fast food and fast casual chains rate on reducing the use of antibiotics in the beef supply.

<http://uspirg.org/chain-reaction>



A-

D



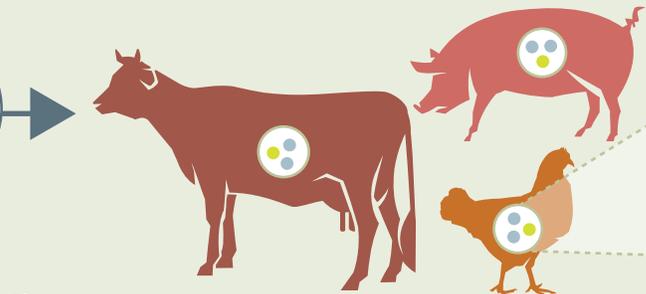


ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

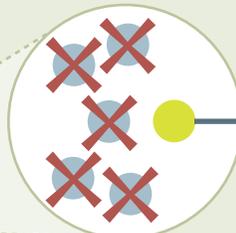
from the farm to the table

RESISTANCE

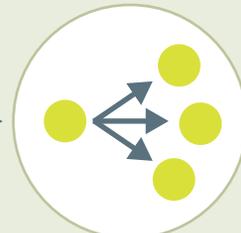
Animals can carry harmful **bacteria** in their intestines



When **antibiotics** are given to animals...



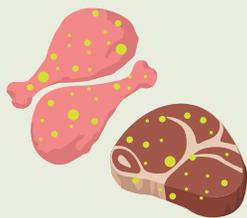
Antibiotics kill most bacteria



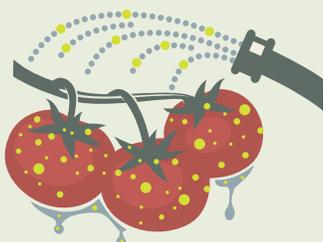
But resistant bacteria can survive and multiply

SPREAD

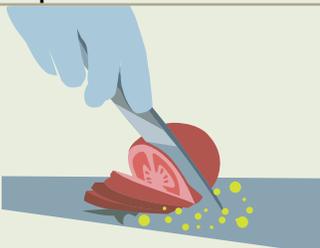
Resistant bacteria can spread to...



animal products



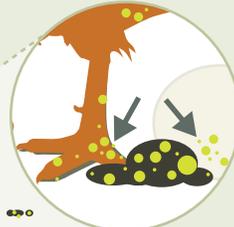
produce through contaminated water or soil



prepared food through contaminated surfaces



the environment when animals poop



EXPOSURE

People can get sick with resistant infections from...



contaminated food



contaminated environment

Learn 4 steps to prevent food poisoning at www.foodsafety.gov

IMPACT

Some resistant infections cause...



mild illness



severe illness and may lead to death

About **1 in 5** resistant infections are caused by germs from food and animals.

Source: *Antibiotic Resistant Threats in the United States, 2013*

Learn more about antibiotic resistance and food safety at www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/antibiotic-resistance.html
Learn more about protecting you and your family from resistant infections at www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/protecting_yourself_family.html



S.5742-A/A.8335

**IN SENATE, BILL NUMBER 5742-A. INTRODUCED BY SENATORS KAVANAGH, HOLYMAN, KRUEGER
IN ASSEMBLY, BILL NUMBER 8335. INTRODUCED BY MEMBERS OF ASSEMBLY ROMEO, BRONSON, D'URSO**

AN ACT to amend the education law and the state finance law, in relation to protecting medically important antimicrobials for human public health

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS:

The bill places restrictions on the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals and creates a regular reporting system. The bill requires that medically important antimicrobials (those also used by humans) shall not be administered to a food-producing animal unless ordered through a prescription or a Veterinary Feed Directive given by a licensed veterinarian who has visited the farm operation within the previous 6 months. The bill prohibits the use of medically important antimicrobials in food-producing animals solely for growth promotion, improved feed efficiency, or feed prevention. Medically important antimicrobials can be used only for the purpose and duration specified by a veterinarian.

The bill establishes annual reporting requirements for veterinarians that prescribed, provided, or administered medically important antimicrobials to food-producing animals. It requires the New York State Board of Veterinary Medicine to develop antimicrobial stewardship guidelines and best management practices for veterinarians, livestock owners, and their employees. Moreover, it requires relevant New York State agencies to coordinate with federal agencies in antimicrobial resistance surveillance efforts.

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT:

Physicians and public health experts are sounding the alarm about the threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. That's because life-saving antibiotics are quickly losing their effectiveness. Without swift action to reduce antibiotic use – the best way to slow down the rise and spread of resistant bacteria – the world can expect a bleak future in which a simple scrape could lead to an untimely death.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that at least 23,000 Americans die from drug-resistant infections each year, but researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine think it could be seven times as many – up to 162,000 deaths annually.

Most people who hear that antibiotics are losing their effectiveness think about doctors wrongly prescribing the drugs to humans. Many physicians can and should prescribe antibiotics more judiciously in human health care. However, in the United States, about two-thirds of the antibiotics considered important to human health are sold for use in food-animal production.

Animals sick with infections should be treated with antibiotics. But often, livestock growers give the drugs on a routine basis in food and water to large numbers of animals that are not sick to prevent diseases commonly spurred by unsanitary, overcrowded, and stressful living conditions. Trying to compensate for industrial farming conditions is not an appropriate use of life-saving medicines.

Overusing antibiotics in any setting fuels the rise and spread of drug-resistant bacteria. It's no different on farms. When animals receive regular doses of antibiotics, the drugs will kill most of the bacteria but those that are resistant will survive, multiply, and can travel off the farm. Humans are exposed to these antibiotic-resistant bacteria via contaminated food-animal products, direct contact with animals, or through

contaminated water and soil, especially those used on food crops. The illnesses these bacteria cause in people may not respond to available antibiotics.

Despite knowing for decades about the health risks of overusing antibiotics in food production, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has taken only half measures to address the problem. The agency recently prohibited antibiotic use for growth promotion in food-producing animals and increased veterinary oversight. Although these are steps forward, they have not stopped livestock growers from continuing to use antibiotics on a massive scale to prevent disease. Growers should focus on changing farming practices to ensure their animals stay healthy without having to administer antibiotics on a regular basis.

In November 2017, the World Health Organization called on food producers to stop using medically important antibiotics in food-producing animals for routine disease prevention and to reserve their use for sick animals.

State lawmakers in California and Maryland have placed restrictions on antibiotic use in food-producing animals. Now it's time for New York's elected officials to heed the warnings from medical experts.

The bill will prohibit the routine use of medically important antibiotics for disease prevention and reserve the drugs solely to treat sick animals, to control a verified disease outbreak, or for certain surgical procedures.

The way food is grown should not undermine modern medicine. The state can preserve both New York's rich agricultural tradition and do its part to preserve the efficacy of antibiotics.

June 3, 2019

Re: Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant “Superbugs”

Dear Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, Senate Minority Leader Flanagan, and Assembly Minority Leader Kolb:

There is a growing threat to public health from emergent strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, also known as “superbugs.” And while the medical community grapples with how best to respond, the undersigned organizations urge you to directly address one of its major causes – the misuse and overuse of medically important antibiotics in agriculture. We ask your support for action to eliminate the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals for disease prevention (except in very limited circumstances) and to allow use only for treatment of sick animals and for certain medical procedures.

Here are the facts: In the U.S., approximately 65 percent of medically important antibiotics, i.e., those that are important for human medicine, are also sold for use in food animals – cattle, pigs, turkeys, chickens – typically raised in large-scale industrialized operations. But most of the animals getting antibiotics aren’t actually sick. Nonetheless, antibiotics are being routinely administered to the animals en masse in their food and/or water to allow them to survive often overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions.

Overuse and misuse of antibiotics in food-producing animals creates the perfect conditions for the development of bacteria that are resistant to those same antibiotics – drugs that are critical to human health. While antibiotic resistance is a naturally occurring phenomenon, the speed of its development is pushed into hyperdrive when bacteria are repeatedly exposed to antibiotics such as they are in industrialized farm settings. The antibiotics kill off the bacteria that don’t have resistance, but those that do multiply and spread.

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can travel easily from farms to people. They can contaminate the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink. They can spread easily between people via direct contact, coughing, sneezing, poor hygiene, and sharing of personal items. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can also transfer their resistance to other bacteria, *e.g.*, in the human gut, making those bacteria resistant to medically important antibiotics, too.

The World Health Organization, the United Nations General Assembly, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the New York State Department of Health, and many other public health organizations have identified antibiotic-resistant infections as a grave threat to human health. Antibiotic-resistant infections are currently estimated to be responsible for at least 2 million people in the U.S. become infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and as many as 162,000 of them die from it. A U.K. government-sponsored study predicted 10 million deaths per year worldwide by 2050 – more than from cancer – if action is not taken now to combat antibiotic-resistant infections.

While overuse in medical settings is a primary contributor to antibiotic resistance, overuse and misuse in agriculture creates resistant superbugs that infect people via food, water, airborne dust, and worker exposure. The CDC estimates that approximately 400,000 Americans get sick each year by eating food contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and that 20% of all antibiotic-resistant infections are caused by germs from food and animals. Unchecked, the growing threat of antibiotic resistance will lead to a world where strep throat, tuberculosis, childbirth, tooth infections, skin scrapes, and routine

Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant “Superbugs”

surgery could once again become the death sentences they all too often were before the discovery of antibiotics 100 years ago.

Given these high stakes – and the lack of effective regulation from the federal government – it’s up to states like New York to help save antibiotics and prevent a national health crisis. For this reason, New York should institute a ban on the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals for the purposes of disease prevention. Veterinarians should only prescribe antibiotics to those animals that are sick (e.g., with mastitis), or in certain circumstances to control the outbreak of disease from a contagious animal(s), or in relation to certain medical procedures (e.g., surgery, castration).

Now is the time to enact strong antibiotic use policies that will keep medically important drugs working for us and protect them for use by future generations. New York should join California and Maryland in leading the fight against antibiotic resistance.

Sincerely,

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Cailen LaBarge,
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Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant "Superbugs"