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Pew Commission Report Supports Other Expert Group Findings That Overuse of Antibiotics in Agriculture Threatens Human Health

BOSTON, MA - The Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production's final report, "Putting Meat on The Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America," released in Washington DC on Tuesday April 29, calls for elimination of antibiotic use for growth promotion in animals. Like other policy reports, it is contested by the animal food industry, which has an economic stake in improving efficiency in food animal production.

In 2002, the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA) published a similar report, "The Need to Improve Antimicrobial Use in Agriculture," in the medical journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, calling for immediate action by government and the agriculture industry to reduce the human health risks identified in the report. The national scientific experts involved in the APUA report also recommended elimination of antibiotic use for growth promotion and limiting farm use of critically important drugs, such as fluoroquinolones and third generation cephalosporins, which are needed for hard-to-treat human infections. The World Health Organization, the Institute of Medicine, the American Medical Association (AMA), APUA, and now the Pew Commission have called for a ban on those growth-promoting drugs that are essential in human medicine. However, the U.S. government has yet to provide an adequate response to protect U.S. patients from galloping resistance.

There is heightened recognition and concern that the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals contributes to the development of resistance in bacteria that find their way into food and humans. Public health experts have long worried that producers are squandering human miracle drugs on animals. In 2001, the Union of Concerned Scientists estimated that an astounding 70% of the antibiotics produced in the United States each year goes to food animals. In 2002, APUA reported that drug resistance in the United States leads to 47,000 additional salmonella and campylobacter infections each year. Such food-borne superbugs are more virulent and afflict more people because it takes fewer organisms to cause infection. These infections especially threaten children, older people and individuals whose immune systems are weak and likely to depend on antibiotics for survival.

Kathy Young, APUA Executive Director, states that leadership and increased incentives and funding by Congress and the Administration are long overdue. APUA commends Senators Edward Kennedy, Sherrod Brown and Orrin Hatch, as well as Representatives Jim Matheson, Michael Ferguson and Stephen Lynch for their legislative leadership, diligence, and commitment to containing antimicrobial resistance. In the face of this intensifying crisis, APUA, the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), AMA, and others are currently advocating for legislative action in 2008 through the Strategies to Address Antimicrobial Resistance (STAAR) Act and the Prescription Drug User Fee Act (PDUFA) to provide incentives to new drug development and ensure better stewardship of existing life saving crucial antibiotics. The STAAR Act would strengthen federal antimicrobial resistance surveillance, prevention and control in the U.S.

The reauthorization of PDUFA significantly broadens and upgrades the agency's drug safety program, increases resources for review of television drug advertising, and facilitates more efficient development of safe and effective new medications for the American public.

The Preservation of Antibiotics for Human Treatment Act (PAMTA) of 2007 serves to phase out the use of non-therapeutic antibiotics in livestock. The act provides for Federal payments to farmers to defray their costs in switching to antibiotic-free husbandry practices.

"Antibiotics are truly societal agents. Each individual dose affects the community," says Dr. Levy. Because antibiotic misuse in one patient has such a broad impact on entire facilities and communities, APUA advocates that antibiotics be considered a special, "protected" regulatory class. This approach would enable unique economic incentives and better antibiotic stewardship requirements to be applied. Priority antibiotics, diagnostics, and vaccines should qualify for tax relief for R&D, cost reduction and/or support of clinical trials, and extended market exclusivity.

A European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) expert panel recently stated that hygiene controls should be tightened at every stage of the food chain, including in veterinary medicine and food processing and preparation so that the development and spread of antimicrobial resistance could be halted. APUA agrees that chronic subtherapeutic antibiotic usage, such as growth promotion, poses a major ecological problem by disrupting the normal bacterial flora of the animals and promotes the growth of antibiotic resistant bacteria in the environment. "Resistant bacteria and their respective genes do not need passports in order to cross country borders" says Dr. Stuart B. Levy, president APUA.

Antimicrobial resistant infections are difficult to treat and cost billions of dollars to the U.S. health care system annually. Compounding the problem is the lack of antibiotics in the pipeline due to companies leaving the antibiotic field to pursue more profitable investments for chronic illnesses and lifestyle disorders. All uses of antibiotics in animals, agriculture and humans contribute to the development of resistant bacteria. APUA, working to minimize unnecessary use and misuse of antibiotics, applauds Senators Kennedy, Brown, and Hatch and Representatives Matheson, Ferguson and Lynch for their committed efforts to preserve the strength of antibiotics. It is incumbent upon all concerned individuals to foster more appropriate use of antibiotics in order to preserve their effectiveness.

About APUA

Established in 1981, the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA) is a global non-profit, public health organization conducting research, education, and advocacy to improve antimicrobial usage and access to effective antimicrobial treatments, and to stimulate the development of new antimicrobial drugs. For more information, go to www.apua.org.

Notable quotes to highlight:

"Resistant bacteria and their respective genes do not need passports in order to cross country borders"

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