

REINING IN THE OVERUSE OF

# Antibiotics



A tied-up Hereford cow was grassing in the wrong pasture and got into the Tilton Ranch in Coyote Valley, Morgan Hill, Calif., recently. The new guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration, which are voluntary, advise the agricultural industry to use antibiotics "judiciously" in treating and preventing sickness, and recommend that veterinarians oversee usage.

JOSIE LEPE/SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS/MCT

## FDA Calls For 'Judicious' Antibiotic Use On Farms

BY BETH MARIE MOLE

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SAN JOSE, Calif. — After decades of debate, federal regulators have condemned the practice of using antibiotics on healthy farm animals, trying to stem the rise in so-called "superbugs" that pose a dire threat to human health.

The new guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration, which are voluntary, advise the agricultural industry to use antibiotics "judiciously" in treating and preventing sickness, and recommend that veterinarians oversee usage. The new stance follows studies by scientists and the FDA from the 1970s, which showed that antibiotics given on farms lead to drug-resistant bacteria the superbugs — that can spread to humans.

In the past several decades, health care professionals as well as veterinarians have seen a steep rise in drug-resistant infections. Just one of the types of resistant bacteria, Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), found in both farms and hospitals, has been estimated to kill more people than AIDS, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. MRSA has also been found on packaged meat in grocery store shelves.

While many scientists and the American Veterinary Medical Association laud the FDA's move, state ranchers and dairy farmers fear they're headed down a trail of over-regulation that would stymie the health care of their animals. Meanwhile, public interest groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, say the guidelines are simply not strong enough.

The FDA is giving the industry three years to adopt the guidelines before it determines the next step, which could be to make the rules mandatory.

"Antibiotic resistance has increased tremendously over the last several decades," said Dr. Stuart Levy, an expert on the issue. The situation is critical, he added, because the resistant bacteria travel with food products from the farm to home.

A 2010 report by the CDC found an alarming amount of superbugs in grocery stores. More than half of all ground turkey carried E. coli that was resistant to three or more drugs. E. coli causes gastrointestinal infections and sickens about 265,000 people each

year, according to the CDC.

Similarly, half of all packaged pork chops were contaminated with multi-drug resistant salmonella, another cause of gastrointestinal illnesses that sickens 1.2 million people each year and results in almost 500 deaths.

In a separate study published earlier this year, Iowa researchers found that nearly 7 percent of packaged pork products carried MRSA, even meat labeled "antibiotic free."

Most food experts do say that the new guidelines will have little, if any, impact on grocery prices — even if they're made mandatory.

**"Antibiotic resistance is perhaps the most complex issue facing agriculture today."**

DR. MICHAEL PAYNE

Farmers learned in the 1950s that if they gave healthy animals food with a dash of antibiotics — less than the dose used to treat an illness — the animals would grow bigger and need less food. And nearly all of the antibiotics were available over-the-counter.

However, that also created perfect conditions for generating superbugs, according to numerous studies.

In a 1976 study, a team of researchers, led by Levy, fed chickens low doses of the antibiotic tetracycline — a drug also used in humans for a wide variety of infections including sexually transmitted diseases and acne. Within a week, the birds had tetracycline-resistant bacteria in their intestines. In less than six months, farmworkers and neighbors had spikes in tetracycline-resistant bacteria in their fecal samples.

But, some agricultural experts claim that published data regarding antibiotic use on farms is often contradictory. Dr. Michael Payne, a food safety expert at UC Davis, pointed to a 2002 USDA study that indicated that low-doses of antibiotics in turkeys knocked down salmonella levels, which commonly causes intestinal infections in people. But the study didn't address resistance levels.

"Antibiotic resistance is perhaps the most complex issue facing agriculture today," said Payne.

Despite the worrisome 1976 findings, the FDA didn't change the rules for antibiotic use on farms.

"We think basically that the FDA has caved to the agricultural industry," said Avinash Kar, a staff attorney for the NRDC.

The organization was one of several public interest groups that sued the FDA last May to press for strict rules on antibiotic usage on farms. The FDA produced the new voluntary guidelines independently from the lawsuit. But a federal judge ruled last month that the FDA must act on the issue, and that the new guidelines would not excuse the FDA from reviewing its approval of antibiotics used on healthy animals. Legal proceedings are under way to determine the next step.

The food safety director of one of the groups, The Center for Science in the Public Interest, called the new guidelines "tragically flawed."

Such groups are skeptical that the industry will adopt them.

"I think we might see some changes and hear all the right noises, but that doesn't mean that it's going to make changes at the level of industry where we need to see it," Kar said.

Other groups are concerned that the guidelines haven't spelled out the changes clearly enough for farmers, veterinarians and drug companies.

The guidelines clearly condemn using antibiotics for growth promotion, but farmers also give healthy animals antibiotics to prevent sickness.

"I think there's a lot of overlap between promotion and disease prevention. So there's a big loophole," said Laura Rogers, who directs the Pew Campaign on Human Health and Industrial Farming.

In contrast, state ranchers, dairy producers and national agricultural associations feel the new FDA guidelines are heavy-handed regulations not based on science.

"Voluntary is really relative when you have a regulatory agency telling you how they want you to do business," said Dr. Liz Wagstrom, chief veterinarian for the National Pork Producers Council.

"I really don't think there was a public health risk from growth promotion," said Dr. Scott Hurd, former deputy undersecretary, food safety, for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "But on the other side, I think it will remove the black-eye that the industry had."

## Farm Income From Crop Sales Up In 2011

MITCHELL — Livestock sales in 2011 amounted to 51.9 percent and crop sales accounted for 37.0 percent of cash operating income. Government payments were 1.4 percent of cash operating income in 2011 compared to 2.0 percent in 2010. Other farm income amounted to 9.8 percent in 2011. This data is based on the information obtained from the farmers and ranchers enrolled in the Farm/Ranch Business Management Program through the Mitchell Technical Institute.

"Average crop yields, higher crop prices, average beef prices, and higher hog and milk prices in 2011 helped balance the livestock income and crop income," said Chris Downs, Farm Management Instructor at Mitchell Technical Institute.

The most profitable crops in 2011 were Alfalfa Hay at \$75/acre, Soybeans at \$184/acre, Corn at \$411/acre, Winter wheat showed a return/acre of \$157 in 2011. No government payments were included in these crop enterprises.

The average yield in 2011 for Alfalfa Hay was 3.4 tons/acre, Soybeans at 36.1 bu/ac, Corn at 126 bu/ac, and Winter Wheat at 60 bu/ac.

The total cost per acre excluding land cost for Alfalfa was \$181/acre, Soybeans at \$156/acre, Corn at \$286/acre, and Winter Wheat at \$204/acre. To these figures one needs to add their land cost. This will vary depending upon if owned, cash rented or if crop shared. If we add a land cost of \$100/acre to \$286 cost/acre for corn and divide by \$5/bu. harvest price we would need 77 bu/ac to break even. This does not include any government payments. The expenses per acre included fertilizer, chemicals, seed, crop insurance, machinery ownership and operation, interest, and other miscellaneous expenses.

"Profitability depends on consistent high yields, price received, and low total production costs," said Mr. Downs.

The Farm/Ranch Business Management Program is offered to farmers and ranchers in eastern South Dakota through the Mitchell Technical Institute. The purpose of the program is to assist farm and ranch operators in upgrading their management skills.

## Pork Quality Assurance Training May 22

BROOKINGS — Producers seeking Pork Quality Assurance Plus Certification (PQA Plus) and swine professionals seeking PQA Plus Advisor training or retraining will have the opportunity to complete their training at a session to be held May 22 at 10 a.m. at South Dakota State University, Brookings, in the Animal Science Complex.

All individuals interested in either certification or advisor status will participate in the session starting at 10 a.m., while those who seek advisor status will extend their training session into the afternoon. A noon lunch will be provided, courtesy of the South Dakota Pork Producers Council.

Registration information: Swine producers seeking PQA Plus Certification: please preregister with Janice Kampmann at janice.kampmann@sdstate.edu. No application form is necessary.

Swine professionals seeking initial PQA Plus Advisor Status: complete and return the form found on iGrow.org. PQA Plus Advisor Status is available to swine professionals that meet certain qualifications and complete the Advisor Training.

Advisor Status allows swine professionals to conduct certifications and site assessments through the PQA Plus program. Current PQA Plus Advisors seeking re-training, visit iGrow.org and complete and return the form. Indicate the date and location of your last PQA Plus Advisor training session.

For more information contact Russ Daly, Extension Veterinarian, at 605-688-6589 or Bob Thaler, State Extension Swine Specialist at 605-688-5435.

## Farm Safety Day Camp In Yankton May 30

A Farm Safety Day Camp will be held at the Yankton County 4-H Building, 709 Whiting Dr., on Wednesday, May 30. Activities run from 12:30-4 p.m.

Nine different community businesses and organizations will be on hand to promote safety and awareness to participants of this day camp. Topics to be covered range from animal to lawnmower to machinery and grain safety. The cost to attend is free, and Avera will donate a First Aid kit to the first 100 who sign up.

Call the Yankton County Extension Office at 665-3387 or email yankton.pa@sdstate.edu by May 23 to sign up.

## Dairy Industry To Be Promoted In June

From P&D Staff Reports

KAYLOR — June is Dairy Month, and the Kaylor 4-H Club is promoting the South Dakota dairy industry.

The Kaylor 4-H Club is teaming up with the Midwest Dairy Association and the South Dakota Opportunity Grant to promote dairy products during the month of June.

The promotion includes giving 25 people in this area the opportunity to win \$20 worth of dairy products. Consumers at the Parkston Food Center and Dimock Dairy can enter their name in the drawing. At the end of the month, a drawing will be held in the two business places, and 25 people will win \$20 gift certificates to purchase dairy products at either Parkston Food Center or Dimock Dairy.

A display will be set up in both businesses to promote the importance of dairy in diets as a nutrient-rich food. South Dakota dairy farmers provide fresh, great tasting, healthy and wholesome milk products.

By promoting dairy products during the month of June, the Kaylor 4-H Club will not only educate the consumer on the importance of dairy but will also contribute to the betterment of South Dakota and Midwest dairy farmers.

Travel with Tammy to  
Lincoln, Nebraska  
June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Join us at The Center for a day trip to Lincoln, Nebraska  
Tuesday, June 5th. We will be leaving The Center at  
8:00am and returning around 11:00pm.

- Capitol Tour & Lunch
- Sugar Plum Candies
- Bedient Pipe Organ Company
- Brewery Tour
- Dinner at Lazlo's

Please Call The Center,  
665-4685 to make your reservations.  
\$70<sup>00</sup> per person and includes lunch and dinner.

### Mitchell Tech Brings CDL Class, Scholarship Opportunity to RTEC!

Whether you are interested in earning your Commercial Drivers License (CDL) or want to enroll in MTI's Industrial Maintenance Technology program that's offered exclusively in Yankton, you can accomplish both through RTEC!

#### CDL Truck Driving Training

You can choose CDL Prep Option, which includes classroom portion May 30 & 31 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Cost is \$350. Full course option includes classroom portion and one-on-one driving with the instructor. Driving times TBA in Mitchell. Cost is \$2,275.

#### Industrial Maintenance Technology

This one-year program, which returns to RTEC in August 2012, is eligible for the Critical Needs Workforce Scholarship. Stop in today and find out if you qualify!

For more details or to enroll, contact RTEC today!

1200 W. 21st St.  
Yankton, SD 57078  
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www.rtecedu.org

### Home Federal Welcomes Kevin DeJong

Home Federal Bank has added the talents of Kevin DeJong as a Senior Ag Banker in Yankton.

A Springfield native, Kevin brings with him more than 15 years of banking experience in the Yankton region with an emphasis on agriculture and business lending.

Kevin is ready to put his talents to work for you. Stop by to welcome Kevin DeJong to the Home Federal team.

**Yankton | 2100 Broadway | 605-665-8205**

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