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KEEP ANTIBIOTICS WORKING STRONGLY SUPPORTS FEINSTEIN-COLLINS ANTIBIOTICS PRESERVATION BILL

Bipartisan Legislation Would Strengthen Food Safety and Protect Public Health

Washington, D.C. - Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) – a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane, and other advocacy groups with more than eleven million supporters – today applauded U.S. Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Susan Collins (R-ME) for reintroducing the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA). Sens. Jack Reed (D-RI) and Barbara Boxer (D-CA) are also sponsors of the bill. KAW strongly supports this vital legislation to protect Americans from increasingly dangerous bacteria that contaminate our food supply. PAMTA would help combat the growing antibiotic resistance crisis by targeting the overuse in animal agriculture of antibiotics critical to human medicine.

Earlier this year, U.S. Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY), the only microbiologist in Congress, introduced PAMTA in the House, where it now has 60 sponsors.

“Each year, hundreds of thousands of Americans suffer from resistant superbug infections coming from food, and the overuse of antibiotics on farm is a main cause,” said Richard Wood, Executive Director of the Food Animal Concerns Trust and Chair of KAW’s Executive Committee. “Antibiotic resistance is a public health crisis that only gets worse every day we don’t act. We thank Senators Feinstein and Collins for their leadership and urge immediate consideration of PAMTA so we can finally address this issue.”

America’s security is threatened as never before by antibiotic resistant “superbugs,” as these bacteria have become increasingly impervious to our dwindling arsenal of effective antibiotics. Officials at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture all testified last year that the enormous use of antibiotics in agriculture – much of it for unnecessary purposes – is an important contributor to the rise of antibiotic resistance affecting people. Recent data released by FDA found that 80 percent of antimicrobial drugs in the United States were sold for use in food animals – most of it not to treat illness, but to promote slightly faster growth and to compensate for crowded, stressful, and unhygienic conditions at industrial-scale livestock and poultry facilities.

“With more people dying from ever-more costly drug-resistant infections, Congress must act to stop wasting our precious drugs before it’s too late.” said Dr. David Wallinga, a physician at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and KAW steering committee member. “FDA’s process for taking animal drugs off the market when they contribute to development of resistant infections in people is far too slow to keep pace with the epidemic rate at which these dangerous infections are now emerging.”

To protect the public health, the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act would require that antibiotics given in feed or water to food animals meet current Food and Drug Administration safety standards related to the spread of dangerous resistant pathogens. The legislation is needed because many of these drugs were approved before the problem of antibiotic resistance was understood and before FDA created new safety standards in 2003 for drugs given to animals. Although the FDA recognizes concerns about overuse of antibiotics in livestock, its procedures are too cumbersome for timely action. The legislation is designed to make it more efficient for FDA to withdraw from the market drugs they find to be creating a public health problem.

The legislation is limited in that it only covers non-therapeutic uses of drugs, and only drugs that are used in humans as well as food animals. It would not affect the ability of veterinarians to use drugs to treat sick animals.

The bill would enhance American farmers' ability to export and ensure the continued leadership of the United States in world food production. Our trade partners are increasingly questioning America's routine overuse of antibiotics in raising pigs, beef cattle and poultry for meat.

Many global competitors have already taken steps to reduce antibiotic use in their production systems. Unless Congress and FDA act to rein in non-therapeutic use of antibiotics here, U.S. exports may face restrictions from global markets.

Notwithstanding the claims of some in industry and Congress, there is an abundant body of sound scientific studies establishing clearly that overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture contributes to antibiotic resistance affecting humans. More information can be found at the link below:

http://www.keepantibioticsworking.com/new/resources_library.cfm?RefID=107403

<http://www.saveantibiotics.org/resources/HHIFBibliographyFinal%20with%20TOC%20012011.pdf>

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