

## **Antibiotic Use in Food Animals: Protecting Animal Health, Safeguarding Human Health**

**Healthy animals produce healthful food.** Humans and animals alike get sick, requiring the use of medication. For more than 40 years, antibiotics approved by the Food and Drug Administration have been used to treat sick animals, prevent illness and maintain the health of animals. Livestock and poultry producers rely on these products so they can provide U.S. consumers with the safest food possible.

**Several layers of protection have been put in place to ensure antibiotics are used to keep animals healthy without harm to public health.** While it is possible that antibiotic resistant bacteria can develop in animals as a direct result of antibiotic use and can cause resistant infections in humans via food, studies show it is highly improbable. Despite the scientific uncertainty, FDA, the Department of Agriculture, along with the veterinary community, animal health companies, producer organizations and other stakeholders have put in place several layers of human health protections during the past decade to reduce any risks associated with antibiotic use in animals. These measures, or layers of protection, include:

- A stringent approval process that was made more stringent in 2003 when FDA finalized an additional safety measure requiring a risk assessment to be applied to all new and existing antibiotics
- Post-approval risk assessments that have been conducted and published by FDA, sponsors and researchers
- Food safety monitoring programs that have been established by government agencies and sponsors to track the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria
- Responsible use programs that are specific to the different livestock species to give veterinarians and producers specific guidelines to safely and properly use antibiotics in their health management systems
- Pathogen reduction programs that have successfully led to documented reductions in pathogens on meat, contributing to decreased food-borne illness.

These many layers of protection have worked well to allow producers to use antibiotics to keep animals healthy while protecting public health from the spread of antibiotic resistance as a result of animal use. Congress should continue to rely on this science-based process and not make political decisions about animal drug approvals.

**Political decisions made without careful risk assessment can backfire and harm human health.** Emerging evidence documents the unintended consequences that can result when policy decisions about antibiotic use are not driven by science and risk assessment. Studies indicate the risk of food borne bacteria on meat increases when antibiotics that help suppress animal disease are removed. There is clear evidence from Denmark that the removal of antibiotics for growth, or health maintenance resulted in more animal death and disease, more use of antibiotics to treat animal disease, and little evidence that antibiotic resistant rates in humans were decreased.