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KAW Welcomes New USDA Antibiotic Research Program

Diverse coalition of scientific, medical and policy experts thank Senators Harkin and Kennedy for their strong leadership

Washington, D.C. – Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW), a coalition of consumer, environmental, science and humane organizations, today announced its support for key provisions embedded in the 2008 Farm Bill that will establish for the first time a research program focused on the development and control of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the agricultural context. The coalition was the key advocate for this forward thinking research provision over the past year.

While much of the 2008 Farm Bill has been controversial, the antibiotic research provision is a welcome effort to assist American agriculture to limit the use of human antibiotics in food animals. The provision authorizes competitive grants to study topics including the movement of antibiotics resistant bacteria into groundwater, methods and practices of animal husbandry to ensure the judicious use of antibiotics, and conditions that affect antibiotic use on farms.

The report language accompanying the grant provision underscores Congress' intention that the research minimize the development and spread of antibiotic resistant bacteria and make the grants a priority area of research.

“The antibiotic research provision could not be more timely,” said Dr. Margaret Mellon, director and senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “It follows on the heels of *Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America*, report done by the Pew Commission and Johns Hopkins University highlighting the needless squandering of human antibiotics in animal agriculture.”

“Establishing the antibiotic research program is a positive step towards ending antibiotic overuse and safeguarding American public health,” Mellon said. “We are grateful for the efforts made by Senators Harkin and Kennedy to include this provision into the Farm Bill.”

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