

STEERING COMMITTEE

Center for Science in the
Public Interest

Environmental Defense

Food Animal Concerns
Trust

Global Resource Action
Center for the Environment

Humane Society of the
United States

Institute for Agriculture
and Trade Policy

National Catholic Rural Life
Conference

Natural Resources Defense
Council

Physicians for Social
Responsibility

Safe Tables Our Priority
(S.T.O.P.)

Sierra Club

Union of Concerned
Scientists

Waterkeeper Alliance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 18, 2007

Contact: Dan Klotz, 202-478-6184-w,
347-307-2866-c, dklotz@mrss.com

FDA ACTION URGED AS ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT BACTERIA CAUSED BY ANIMAL FARMS THREATEN AMERICANS

U.S. Still Has No System to Monitor MRSA in Animal Production; Effectiveness of Critical Cephalosporin Medicines Imperiled

Washington, DC – Keep Antibiotics Working, a coalition of consumer, environmental, science and humane organizations, has written to FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach, MD, urging the Agency to take immediate action on two fronts—methicillin-resistant staphalococcus aureus (MRSA) and cephalosporin-resistant bacteria—to protect the efficacy of medicines that fight lethal bacteria.

The coalition's letter details evidence showing that the use of drugs in livestock is contributing to the current methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) epidemic in Europe and suggests it could play a similar role here. The research includes a recent study published in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases* that links a new MRSA strain initially found only in pigs to more than 20 percent of all human MRSA infections in the Netherlands. Research published this fall in *Veterinary Microbiology* found MRSA was also prevalent in Canadian pigs and pig farmers, pointing again to animal agriculture as a source of the deadly bacteria.

Despite these studies and others from Europe dating back to 2005, the United States does not systematically test pigs, cattle, and other food animals for MRSA. As a result, the US public health establishment does not know whether the use of antibiotics in food animals in the United States is contributing to the reported surge of MRSA cases in the United States.

The heavy use of antibiotics in industrialized livestock operations can select for resistant bacteria, such as MRSA. The Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that 70% of all the antibiotics and related drugs used in the United States are used as feed additives for chicken, hogs, and beef cattle.

The coalition's letter also pointed to the proposed agricultural use of a 4th generation cephalosporin, cefquinome, which belongs to a class of drugs used to treat serious and life-threatening infections in patients with compromised immune systems. In September 2006, the FDA's Veterinary Medicine Advisory Committee rejected the claim that this use be considered safe, but the drug's manufacturer, Intervet (recently acquired by Schering-Plough), has yet to withdraw their application for FDA approval. Advocates, joined by the American Medical Association, the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, fear approval despite the majority opinion of the FDA's own experts

Proposed federal legislation, especially important in light of the FDA's passive reaction to this health crisis, would phase out the use of antibiotics that are important in human medicine as animal feed additives within two years. The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act is sponsored by Senate Health Committee Chairman Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Senators Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Susan Collins (R-ME), Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Jack Reed (D-RI) in the Senate (S. 549) and Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY), the only microbiologist in Congress, and 34 other House members in the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 962).