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The Campaign to End Antibiotic Overuse

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Studies Called "Smoking Gun" Proving Antibiotic Resistance in Humans Related to Drug Use in Animals

New England Journal of Medicine Editorial Calls for Ban on Antibiotic Use in Healthy Animals

Boston/Washington, DC - A guest editorial in tomorrow's New England Journal of Medicine calls for a ban on the use of antibiotics in healthy farm animals for growth promotion, calling three studies in the issue the "smoking gun" linking the use of antibiotics in animal production with antibiotic resistance in humans.

One study shows the high prevalence of antibiotic-resistant Salmonella in ground meats, the second suggests that a drug (Virginiamycin) used only in animals has compromised the effectiveness of a human drug (Synercid), and the third demonstrates that antibiotic-resistant bacteria can persist for at least two weeks in the human gut.

Based on these three studies in the same issue, members of Keep Antibiotics Working, a coalition of health, consumer, and environmental groups, had the following comments:

"These studies and editorial provide one clear message: antibiotic resistance is becoming a serious public health problem in America, and the routine feeding of antibiotics to healthy farm animals is an important cause of the problem," said Tamar Barlam, M.D., an infectious disease specialist and Director of the Project on Antibiotic Resistance for the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

"Animal production facilities can implement relatively simple practices that reduce the need for antibiotics—simple steps such as keeping the animals in a cleaner environment, limiting their exposure to other animals, and raising them in less crowded conditions," said David Wallinga, M.D., Director of the Antibiotic Resistance Project for the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

"In fact, many European countries have outlawed the use in farm animals of antibiotics important to human medicine," said Margaret Mellon, Ph.D., JD, Food and Environment Program Director for the Union of Concerned Scientists. A study done earlier this year by UCS estimated that 70% of the antimicrobials (including antibiotics) used in the U.S. were used for non-therapeutic purposes in healthy animals.

"These studies provide more strong evidence that feeding antibiotics to livestock undermines their value for people. Congress should ban inappropriate agricultural uses of antibiotics as soon as possible," concluded Dr. Wallinga.