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## **Former UNC Health Policy Analyst Warns State Officials on Link between Slaughterhouse Expansion and Antibiotic Resistance**

### ***Hearing Testimony Cites Link Between Antibiotic Use in Hogs & Potentially Deadly Food Poisoning in Humans***

**Dublin, NC** - A former University of North Carolina health policy analyst warned state officials at a hearing Monday night that granting Smithfield Foods' request to increase its Bladen County slaughterhouse kill rate by one million hogs per year will worsen the emerging public-health crisis of antibiotic resistance.

"The regular and routine feeding of antibiotics to animals has been clearly shown to promote the rapid and widespread development of antibiotic resistant bacteria.," testified Melva Fager Okun, DrPH, at a hearing conducted by the North Carolina Division of Water Quality for public comment at the Bladen County Community College on Smithfield's proposed expansion of its Bladen County slaughterhouse from 7.5 million to 8.5 million hogs per year.

The Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that healthy hogs in the U.S. are fed 10 million pounds of antibiotics annually to prevent them from getting sick in the crowded, unsanitary conditions on factory farms; and 95 percent of the antibiotics fed to hogs are identical or similar to antibiotics used to treat sick people.

"Studies also show that antibiotic resistant bacteria, starting in the gut of the hog, can spread easily into the environment" added Okun who worked at the UNC Public School of Health from 1985 to 2001. "[Resistant bacteria] can contaminate other foods and food-preparation surfaces, leading to serious food-borne infections that can cause serious illness and even death."

Okun also cited Smithfield's abysmal public health record, including a record-breaking \$12.6 million fine in 1997 by Environmental Protection Agency for 7,000 violations of the Clean Water Act, as an additional reason not to grant the permit.

Okun testified on behalf of *Keep Antibiotics Working: The Campaign to End Antibiotic Overuse* (KAW) and serves as the campaign's North Carolina Coordinator. KAW is a coalition of concerned health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane and other advocacy groups, with over 9 million members, dedicated to eliminating an important cause of antibiotic resistance—the inappropriate use of antibiotics in farm animals.

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