

Slaughter Reintroduces the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today said we must take action to limit the overuse of antibiotics in animals so these life-saving drugs remain effective in the treatment of human illnesses.

Today Slaughter is reintroducing H.R. 965 the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act. Her legislation would limit the use of seven classes of antibiotics currently used to treat animals, most of which are already healthy, and preserve their use for humans.

“Antibiotic resistance is a major public health crisis, and yet antibiotics are used regularly and with little oversight in agriculture. As a microbiologist, I cannot stress the urgency of this problem enough so today I’m proud to reintroduce the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act,” said Slaughter. **“When we go to the grocery store to pick up dinner, we should be able to buy our food without worrying that eating it will expose our family to potentially deadly bacteria that will no longer respond to our medical treatments. Unless we act now, we will unwittingly be permitting animals to serve as incubators for resistant bacteria.”**

Last week, [Slaughter was featured on MSNBC](#) where she highlighted the potential public health crisis.

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A Public Health Issue

Many of the antibiotics used in agriculture as animal feed additives are also used to treat humans, including tetracyclines, sulfonamides, penicillins, macrolides, aminoglycosides, chloramphenicols, and streptogramins. These classes of antibiotics are critical to our treatment of potentially fatal human diseases. Tetracyclines, for example, are used to treat people

potentially exposed to anthrax. Macrolides and sulfonamides are used to prevent secondary infections in patients with AIDS and to treat pneumonia in HIV-infected patients. Penicillins are used to treat infections ranging from strep throat to meningitis.

Overuse of these classes of antibiotics is contributing to evolving bacteria, like MRSA that leaves its victims untreatable by existing antibiotics.

Kim Madison-Howland of Enid, Oklahoma understands this first hand.

“As a former feed technician at a factory hog farm in Enid, Oklahoma, I have seen the consequences of antibiotics’ overuse firsthand,” said Madison-Howland. “In 2008, both my husband and daughter contracted MRSA. It took multiple rounds of antibiotics to save my husband from this bacteria and my daughter was also able to fight the infection. When I approached the farm’s management about testing the hogs for antibiotic resistance, they acted as though they were unaware of the connection between the overuse of antibiotics and MRSA. The lack of regulation allows these farms to overuse and misuse life-saving medications and it’s making people sick – this practice must be stopped now.”

Every year, two million Americans acquire bacterial infections during their hospital stay, and 90,000 will die from them. Tragically, 70 percent of their infections will be resistant to the drugs commonly used to treat them.

“While we’re giving antibiotics to pigs and chickens, we’re allowing people to die. If anyone believes that antibiotic resistance isn’t a problem, consider the \$16 to \$26 billion that’s added into the cost of our health care system each year going to treat bacteria our antibiotics are ill-equipped to fight,” said Slaughter.

Every time you use antibiotics, they become less effective -- risking the lives and safety of humans who rely on those same antibiotics.

Keeping Animals Healthy

Last week, Slaughter released an alarming statistic she had confirmed with the Food and Drug Administration: 80 percent of the antibiotics used in the United States are given not to humans, but to animals.

“Make no mistake, this bill would in no way infringe upon the use of these drugs to treat a sick animal. It simply proscribes their non-therapeutic use,” said Slaughter. “If an animal is sick, then by all means we should make them well, but the routine use of antibiotics on healthy animals in order to promote growth is dangerous. It would be like a mother giving their son or daughter antibiotics every morning in their Cheerios. We’re wasting our precious antibiotics.”

Creating a Trade Advantage for American Meat and Poultry

The overuse of antibiotics isn’t only a human health issue; it is equally an economic issue. Nations around the world including those of the European Union, New Zealand, Thailand, and Korea all have either banned or will begin banning the use of antibiotics for the purpose of growth promotion in animal feed. Under World Trade Organization rules, trading partners who implement this ban will have the right to refuse imports that do not meet this standard. In essence, if the United States does not conduct similar restrictions, and continues to allow non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock, there may be major trade and economic implications for American farmers.

Denmark banned the use of antibiotics in healthy animals only to see meat quality improve and more global opportunities for their products. Since the peak of antibiotic usage in agriculture in

1992, antimicrobial usage in Denmark per kilogram of pig produced has dropped by more than 50 percent and Danish swine production has increased 47 percent.

In short, eliminating non-therapeutic usage of antibiotics helped position Denmark's agricultural industrially globally.

“Denmark’s own Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries consider their restrictions on antibiotic use to be a success and their swine production has dramatically increased. I believe American meat and poultry should enjoy that same competitive advantage,” said Slaughter.

A Coalition of Support

PAMTA enjoys a broad coalition of support from over 300 organizations in the scientific and medical community. Statements of support are included below.

“It is time for Congress to stand with scientists, the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, and the National Academy of Sciences and do something to address the spread of resistant bacteria,” said Slaughter. □ “We cannot afford for our medicines to become obsolete.”

In addition to this legislation Slaughter is also continuing ongoing work with the Obama Administration to take all steps possible to end the overuse of antibiotics, and preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics for the treatment of human disease.

Slaughter is a microbiologist with a Masters Degree in public health. For more on her work to

protect public health, [click here](#) .

For a full list of organizations supporting PAMTA, statistics about the prevalence of antibiotics in meat, and a list of antibiotic-free food options, [click here](#).