

Slaughter Leads Lawmakers Asking for Increased Oversight of Antibiotics in Agriculture

Rochester, NY – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today lead several of her colleagues in a letter to the FDA asking for greater oversight from of antibiotics used for farm animals.

In a letter sent today to the Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Slaughter along with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Representatives Henry Waxman, Rosa DeLauro, Janice Schakowsky and Gerry Connolly, asked the FDA for speedy progress on regulation and guidance under review, Guidance #209, The Judicious Use of Medically Important Antimicrobial Drugs in Food-Producing Animals, and the Veterinary Feed Directive.

The lawmakers wrote, “We recommend speedy progress forward on the regulations and guidance under review, including Guidance #209, The Judicious Use of Medically Important Antimicrobial Drugs in Food-Producing Animals, and the Veterinary Feed Directive.”

They concluded, “It is time to take action to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics. Every year, nearly two million Americans acquire bacterial infections during their hospital stay, and approximately 100,000 die from them,” the lawmakers wrote. “Seventy percent of these infections are resistant to the drugs commonly used to treat them. Antibiotics are one of the greatest treasures of modern medicine, and we look forward to working with you to preserve their effectiveness.”

The full text of the letter is available below.

The USDA recently called for one of the largest recalls of turkey, due to antibiotic resistant turkey products that have killed one and infected at least 78 people nationwide. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced a recall of 36 million pounds of ground turkey products from Cargill Meat Solutions Corporation, a Springdale, Ark. establishment, due to contamination with a multi-drug resistant strain of Salmonella Heidelberg.

According to the CDC, 26 states, including New York, have reported a total of 78 persons infected with the outbreak strain of Salmonella Heidelberg between March 1 and August 3, 2011.

Slaughter is a long-time leader in food safety and the only microbiologist in Congress. She is the author of the The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA), legislation that would ensure that we preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics for the treatment of human disease.

[For more on PAMTA and her work to protect public health, click here.](#)

Slaughter's letter to FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, M.D.

August 9, 2011

The Honorable Margaret A. Hamburg, M.D.
Commissioner
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Commissioner Hamburg:

When our staff met recently, we reviewed the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) oversight of antibiotics in agriculture. We recommend speedy progress forward on the regulations and guidance under review, including Guidance #209, The Judicious Use of Medically Important Antimicrobial Drugs in Food-Producing Animals, and the Veterinary Feed Directive.

1. Finalize Guidance #209 and establish a strong antibiotics oversight system

Guidance #209 is an important step in the right direction. While this guidance document was issued as "draft guidance" on June 28, 2010, it has not yet been finalized. We recommend that you strengthen Guidance #209, finalize it quickly, and move on to regulations. Given the rise of antibiotic resistant pathogens, we cannot wait any longer for the finalization of Guidance #209.

As you finalize this guidance, we recommend that you clearly and explicitly call for the elimination of the routine use of antibiotics in healthy farm animals. The guidance currently deems 'production uses' as inappropriate, but allows for some 'prevention uses'. This introduces a potentially significant loophole in the regulatory schema, permitting farms to continue to use antibiotics routinely for purposes other than treating disease. The continued sub-therapeutic usage of antibiotics will promote the spread of antibiotic-resistant pathogens. Public health must be preeminent in any definition of the judicious use of antibiotics.

2. Implement meaningful veterinary oversight through Veterinary Feed Directive system

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) on the Agency's 10-year old Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) is an opportunity to take several steps to reduce inappropriate usage of antibiotics on farms: 1) establish meaningful veterinary oversight; and 2) improve data collection.

Meaningful veterinary oversight of antibiotics will help to protect human and animal health. Effective oversight requires more than paperwork. A prescription dispensed by a veterinarian on

one coast for an animal on the other coast does not constitute meaningful oversight. A strong veterinary-client-patient relationship is necessary prior to dispensing antibiotics.

Meaningful veterinary involvement will allow us to strengthen our antibiotic usage surveillance system. Collecting better data on current usage of antibiotics in food animals is not only important for public health, but it is also practical. In many European countries, there are excellent data on the total quantity of antibiotics used in swine, cattle, pig, and poultry production. All antibiotics are purchased on prescription, and pharmacies collect the prescription data. Annual reports on farm uses are released. These reports allow farmers, veterinarians, and public health officials to track the total quantity of antibiotics used per Kg of meat produced, patterns of usage of individual antibiotics, as well as antibiotic levels associated with different types of meat.[1] These data can then be paired with antibiotic resistance monitoring data for animals, meat and people. Comprehensive data collection and analysis will help American consumers to understand how antibiotics are used in livestock production and the potential human health implications.

It is time to take action to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics. Every year, nearly two million Americans acquire bacterial infections during their hospital stay, and approximately 100,000 die from them. 70 percent of these infections are resistant to the drugs commonly used to treat them.

Antibiotics are one of the greatest treasures of modern medicine, and we look forward to working with you to preserve their effectiveness.

Sincerely,

Rep. Louise M. Slaughter
Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand
Rep. Henry Waxman
Rep. Rosa DeLauro
Rep. Janice Schakowsky
Rep. Gerry Connolly