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**Contact:** Dan Klotz, 917-438-4613-w,  
347-307-2866-c, [dklotz@mrss.com](mailto:dklotz@mrss.com)

## **NEW REPORT UNDERSCORES NEED FOR CONGRESSIONAL ACTION TO LIMIT ANTIBIOTIC USE IN ANIMAL AGRICULTURE**

### ***U.S. Fails to Take Basic Steps to Protect Public Health Even as New Tyson Label Responds to Public Concerns***

Washington, DC – A new report by the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production ([www.pcifap.org](http://www.pcifap.org)) documents the perils of antibiotic use in factory farms and the many strains of antibiotic-resistant *E-Coli*, *Salmonella*, *Camphylobacter*, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), and other bacteria that these facilities cause.

The report release comes a few days after Tyson Foods and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agreed on a new label for their chickens raised without antibiotics: “Chicken raised without antibiotics that impact antibiotic resistance in humans.” Tyson announced in June, 2007, that it would stop feeding antibiotics important in human medicine to their chickens, a move that advocated hailed as “a great step forward.” But no other large meat producers have followed suit.

“The added voice of the Pew Commissioners to that of the American Medical Association and the Infectious Diseases Society of America shows the need to stop factory farms from squandering the effectiveness of our antibiotic supply,” said Richard Wood, Steering Committee Chair of the Keep

Antibiotics Working coalition. “But lasting change will only come when the U.S. government decides to act. We hope that the Pew report will help spark that step.”

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 new report details the many links between farm antibiotic use and the spread of resistant infections in humans.

Despite a long awareness of the link between farm antibiotic use and resistance in humans, the United States still allows the routine and unnecessary use of critically important drugs in farm animals for growth promotion. The United States also fails to adequately monitor antimicrobial resistance in farm animals. Even the recent media coverage on MRSA being found in Canadian and European livestock has not prompted the US to check its own livestock to ensure food safety.

Proposed federal legislation 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).

The Keep Antibiotics Working Coalition has recently highlighted a half-dozen scientific studies that clearly demonstrate the escalating health threat:

- *Clinical Infectious Diseases* published a study this month showing that patients in a Dutch hospital who were exposed to pigs or veal calves (mostly farmers) had 3-fold increase in risk for MRSA infections.

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- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Emerging Infectious Diseases* published a study in December linking a new strain of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) once found only in pigs to more than 20 percent of all human MRSA infections in the Netherlands
- *Veterinary Microbiology* published a study in October that found MRSA prevalent in Canadian pig farms and pig farmers, pointing to animal agriculture as a source of the deadly bacteria.
- *Applied and Environmental Microbiology* published a study in August that linked the routine use of the antibiotic tetracycline, popular in swine production, to the presence of antibiotics resistance genes in groundwater.
- *Journal of Food Protection* published a study in August by USDA researchers showing that feeding chickens the antibiotic tylosin to promote growth – not to treat disease – greatly increases the number of erythromycin-resistant *Campylobacter* on chicken carcasses.
- *Emerging Infectious Diseases* published a study in 2006 documenting U.S. veterinarians as carriers of MRSA. In a 2005 survey of attendees at an international veterinary convention in Baltimore, MD, who were tested for MRSA found that of the 27 who tested positive, 23 were from the United States.

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