

STEERING COMMITTEE

Center for Science in the
Public Interest

Environmental Defense

Food Animal Concerns
Trust

Global Resource Action
Center for the Environment

Humane Society of the
United States

Institute for Agriculture
and Trade Policy

National Catholic Rural Life
Conference

Natural Resources Defense
Council

Physicians for Social
Responsibility

Safe Tables Our Priority
(S.T.O.P.)

Sierra Club

Union of Concerned
Scientists

Waterkeeper Alliance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
March 17, 2009

Contact: Angela Pauly, 202-478-6139-w,
apauly@mrss.com

Rep. Slaughter Reintroduces Bill to Help Fight Antibiotic Resistance Crisis by Combating Misuse of Antibiotics in Animal Agriculture

Washington, DC – Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) — a national coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane, and other advocacy groups with more than ten million supporters — today welcomed the reintroduction of a bill that would help combat the antibiotic resistance crisis by targeting the overuse of antibiotics important to human medicine in animal agriculture.

The legislation, “The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act,” (PAMTA) was introduced today in the House by Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY), the only microbiologist in Congress. The re-introduction of the bill builds on the momentum from last year’s Congressional decision to enact a data collection provision in the Animal Drug Use Fee Act (ADUFA), as well as the enactment of an antibiotic resistance research provision into the farm bill.

“This marks a decisive step in the fight to save our diminishing supply of lifesaving antibiotics – a problem we can no longer ignore,” said Margaret Mellon, Senior Scientist at UCS, a member of KAW. “Bacterial populations develop increasing levels of drug resistance over time. The antibiotics used in animal agriculture need to be reviewed to determine whether the increasing levels of resistance have rendered them unsafe due to resistance concerns. Congress must enact legislation that holds the FDA accountable for conducting those reviews.” The bill would review the safety when antibiotics important in human medicine, such as penicillin and tetracycline, are used as additives to animal feed

“More and more Americans are dying of superbug infections because antibiotic treatment has failed. Overusing antibiotics -- whatever the setting -- undercuts their effectiveness for when we really need them,” said Dr. David Wallinga, director of the Food and Health Program at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, a member of KAW. “We commend Representative Slaughter for her continued leadership and we urge Congress to move quickly and pass this critical legislation.”

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) estimates that 70% of all the antibiotics used each year in the United States are fed without a prescription to livestock and poultry — not to treat illness, but to promote slightly faster growth and to compensate for crowded, stressful and unhygienic conditions at industrial-scale livestock and poultry facilities. This practice encourages the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that are transferred to humans via our food, air and water. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable to such bacteria, as they are prone to weaker immune systems.

PAMTA, which is widely supported by the, public health, medical, sustainable agriculture, and animal welfare community, is co-sponsored by 20 Members of Congress, More than 350 groups have endorsed the legislation, including the American Medical Association, the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.