

FACT SHEET

Antibiotic Resistant Foodborne Pathogens - Intensifying the Food Safety Crisis

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

- Foodborne bacteria originating from the production of food animals cause severe and often life-threatening illnesses in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 1.4 million people are infected with *Salmonella* each year and that there are 2.4 million *Campylobacter* infections. The USDA estimates that the cost of illness and death from *Salmonella* alone is 2.5 billion dollars each year.
- Increasingly, these foodborne infections are resistant to one or more antibiotics. CDC data shows that roughly one in five *Salmonella* infections is drug-resistant. Nearly 100,000 of these infections would resist treatment with at least five antibiotics. Roughly one-half of *Campylobacter* infections, or 1.2 million per year, are drug-resistant. Of these, 326,000 cases are resistant to two or more antibiotics
- Many other resistant, disease-causing bacteria are also found on farms and in food, including disease-causing *Escherichia coli*, *Enterococci*, Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), and *Clostridium difficile*. Bacteria made resistant on the farm can transfer resistance traits to other bacteria, including disease-causing bacteria found in the human body.
- Resistance increases the already high cost of foodborne disease. The hundreds of thousands of cases of resistant foodborne illness are more severe and lead to higher rates of hospitalization than ordinary contamination, which adds significantly to the nation's spiraling healthcare costs. Based on experience with MRSA, resistant infections can increase the cost of illness by 40 to 50 percent.
- Foodborne bacteria carry high levels of resistance traits because large amount of antibiotics are given to food producing animals often in feed and water for growth promotion and other non-therapeutic purposes. Studies have consistently shown that feeding low doses of antibiotics to large numbers of food animals over long periods of time leads to resistance.
- Antimicrobial resistance is a global problem and imported foods can also be a source of resistant pathogens. In 2007 the FDA imposed import controls on Chinese seafood because of concerns about antibiotic resistance. Chinese fish farmers often use antibiotics, like fluoroquinolones, that are prohibited for use in the U.S.
- The federal government needs to act on this serious food safety problem. FDA's food safety initiative should review the safety of antibiotics used in animal feeds in light of the threat of antimicrobial resistance and remove from the market any products that are unsafe. Imports should be monitored for the presence of resistant bacteria.