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ANTIBIOTICS
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The Campaign to End Antibiotic Overuse

For Immediate Release:
March 31, 2003

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USDA's Proposed Standards for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claims on Antibiotics Would Create "Confusion" for Consumers, "Loopholes" for Producers

Group Fighting Antibiotic Resistance Urges USDA to Go Back to the Drawing Board

Washington, D.C. – The USDA's proposed standards for livestock and meat marketing claims about antibiotic use are bad medicine for consumers and the USDA should "rethink and clarify the claims," according to a letter from the Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) campaign. The letter was submitted to meet today's deadline for comments on the proposed standards, which are posted on USDA's website at www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/stand/claim.htm.

"Unfortunately, with the exception of the 'No antibiotics used, or Raised without Antibiotics,' USDA's proposed labels for meats...with respect to the use of antibiotics are confusing, misleading, and subject to abuse in the marketplace," wrote KAW. "...[M]eat labels giving consumers choices of products produced with reduced antibiotics could help accomplish the public health goal of reducing the use of antibiotics in animal agriculture." KAW offers consumers a free guide to buying meats raised without the routine use of antibiotics (www.KeepAntibioticsWorking.com/EatWell).

The Union of Concerned Scientists estimates 70 percent of all antibiotics used in the U.S. – 24 million pounds each year – are given to beef cattle, hogs, and poultry that are not sick, mostly without a prescription, for growth promotion and to compensate for cramped, unhealthy conditions on conventional factory farms. More than half of these antibiotics are identical or nearly identical to antibiotics important in human medicine.

A study released two weeks ago by the Institute of Medicine concluded that the FDA should ban the use of antibiotics used in humans "for growth promotion in animals," because "evidence suggests animals can be raised efficiently without the use of growth-promoting" antibiotics. IOM also noted that: "Clearly, a decrease in [antibiotic] use in human medicine alone will have little effect on the current [antibiotic resistance] situation. Substantial efforts must be made to decrease inappropriate overuse in animals and agriculture as well."

"USDA's standards for how meats can be marketed need to be crystal clear so consumers can easily identify and find a variety of meat products already produced without the routine use of antibiotics," said Dr. David Wallinga, a physician and Antibiotic Resistance Project Director at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. "Instead, the standards offered by USDA would create hopeless confusion for consumers, and huge loopholes for irresponsible producers hoping to sell their meats at a premium without bothering to take the common sense step of only giving antibiotics to animals when they are sick."

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Keep Antibiotics Working (www.KeepAntibioticsWorking.com) is a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane and other advocacy groups with over nine million members dedicated to eliminating a major cause of antibiotic resistance: the inappropriate use of antibiotics in food animals.