



**INSTITUTE FOR  
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**Talking Turkey: Stuffing, Cranberries, Sweet Potatoes and...Arsenic?**

***Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and Center for Food Safety Petition FDA to Eliminate Toxic Arsenic Residues in Meat***

**Washington, D.C., November 22** – Nearly 88 percent of Americans surveyed by the National Turkey Federation eat turkey at Thanksgiving, but most will be blissfully unaware of what their turkey may have eaten—arsenic. Arsenic-containing compounds have been added to animal feeds since the 1940s, including in turkey, chicken and swine production where they are FDA-approved for “increased weight gain, improved feed efficiency, and improved pigmentation.”

Today, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and the Center for Food Safety (CFS) filed a petition calling on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to vastly reduce the legally permissible level of arsenic in meat. Pharmaceutical companies produce and sell three arsenic compounds which are added to animal feed, despite serious risks to public health.

“Arsenic’s a poison that causes cancer, among other harm,” said physician David Wallinga, M.D. of IATP. “The FDA can’t seriously uphold its public health mission while allowing residues of arsenic in the meat our children and families eat. That’s why we’ve submitted this petition.”

In 1944, 3-Nitro became the first arsenic-containing product approved by the FDA for use in food animals. On June 8, 2011 the FDA announced that Pfizer had voluntarily agreed to stop selling 3-Nitro, also known as roxarsone, of which it is the sole producer. FDA sought the voluntary ban based on its own study that detected inorganic arsenic in the livers of chickens treated with 3-Nitro, and not in the untreated chickens. Inorganic arsenic is a known carcinogen.

Before the FDA action, IATP had estimated in its 2006 report, [\*Playing Chicken: Avoiding Arsenic in Your Meat\*](#), that more than 70 percent of all U.S. chickens raised for meat are fed arsenic. The European Union has never approved the use of arsenicals in animal feed, acknowledging the lack of science supporting health or safety standards for such use. U.S. organic producers do not use 3-Nitro.

“Allowing arsenic residues in animal feed additives is irresponsible and dangerous,” said the Center for Food Safety’s Paige Tomaselli. “FDA’s own research shows that when arsenic is added to animal feeds, it ends up as carcinogenic residues in meat and other tissues. It’s time for FDA to change the tolerance for these drugs to reflect what the agency knows to be true. The tolerances must be reduced.”

While IATP and CFS applaud Pfizer’s agreement to stop selling 3-Nitro in the U.S., Pfizer has provided no indication it will stop marketing 3-Nitro in as many as 11 other countries in which it has been sold, or that it will

stop selling other FDA-approved arsenic feed additives such as carbarsone, nitarsonone or arsanilic acid. [See online table for full list.](#)

In announcing the Pfizer ban, FDA stressed that it does not think the increased arsenic in meat poses a human health threat. Inorganic arsenic, however, is known to cause multiple types of cancer in humans, and the science suggests that exposure in food or elsewhere will increase risk of developing those cancers across the population. In December 2009, IATP and CFS also submitted a citizen's petition to the FDA seeking withdrawal of its approval of roxarsone, nitarsonone, carbarsone and arsanilic acid in animal feed. FDA has made no decision on that citizen's petition. Read the 2009 [full petition](#).

Read IATP's 2006 report on arsenic in poultry: [Playing Chicken: Avoiding Arsenic in Your Meat](#).

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***The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy** works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. [www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org).*

***The Center for Food Safety** is a national nonprofit membership organization, founded in 1997, that works to protect human health and the environment by curbing the use of harmful food production technologies and by promoting organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture. [www.centerforfoodsafety.org](http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org).*