

Pew Campaign Wrong on Antibiotics

The Pew Campaign on Human Health and Industrial Farming is running an advertising campaign in Washington, D.C. aimed at removing important animal health medicines veterinarians and farmer need' The campaign makes six charges – all of which are untrue.

Here's What the Ad Claims: 70% of antibiotics go to animals that aren't sick.

Here's the Truth: This figure comes from an unscientific report prepared in 2001 by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) which utilized study methods that do not reflect the actual amount of antibiotics used. It includes antibiotics used to prevent and control disease in animals – important uses considered to be “therapeutic” by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the World Organization for Animal Health. Annual data provided by animal health makers shows some 87 percent of antibiotics used in animals are used for these therapeutic purposes.

Nearly half of the total amount estimated by UCS is ionophores -- compounds not used in human medicine with no potential impact on antibiotic resistance. Ironically, in 2007, one of the authors of the UCS report said of ionophores, “In the more than 10 years I've been in this issue, they've never been considered antibiotics.”

Here's What the Ad Claims: The use of antibiotics in agriculture is making human diseases harder to cure.

Here's the Truth: There's no question that antibiotic resistance is an important public health issue. However, the specific types of antibiotic resistances that are most troubling in human medicine are not related to use of antibiotics in animals – because the bacteria or drug involved is not found or used in animals.

Here's What the Ad Claims: Misuse of antibiotics adds billions to health care costs.

Here's the Truth: According to CDC, there are estimated health care costs associated with the problem of antibiotic resistance in humans. Experts agree that the vast majority of the problem results from hospital and community use – not agricultural use.

Here's What the Ad Claims: Drug dependent factory farms feed antibiotics to offset crowding.

Here's the Truth: Colorful language, but it could not be more wrong. Animals have always been raised in groups. Like people, animals also get sick and need antibiotics to get well. Modern production systems are designed to reduce animal exposure to disease by protecting them from weather, insects, rodents, predators and people who might spread disease.

Here's What the Ad Claims: The misuse of antibiotics in agriculture breeds drug-resistant diseases.

Here's the Truth: Antibiotics can select for resistance whenever they are used. That's why – along with cost – producers and veterinarians are careful to use no more than what is necessary to protect the health of the animal.

Here's What the Ad Claims: Factory farm animals get antibiotics daily in their feed.

Here's the Truth: Antibiotics used in animals are approved by FDA, and the FDA-approved label – which must be followed – gives specific doses and duration of use. The label directions apply no matter what kind of production system is used.

The irony is that banning uses of antibiotics in animal health will increase the risk to public health. A safe food supply starts with healthy animals. In Europe, when antibiotics used for growth promotion were banned, animal death and disease increased. In Denmark, the use of antibiotics to treat animal disease doubled. In The Netherlands, antibiotic use increased in the face of increased animal disease. Most significantly, some important antibiotic resistances increased in humans, even as these same resistances were declining in the United States.

For more information, see

www.ahi.org

Institute of Food Technologists expert report at

http://members.ift.org/IFT/Research/IFTExpertReports/antimicrobial_report.htm