

July 7, 2010

The Honorable Betty Sutton  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Sutton,

As public health professionals, members of the Ohio Public Health Association have a professional obligation to advocate for policies that are necessary to maintain public health. Effective antibiotics are critical to human health, and we cannot afford to lose the efficacy of one antibiotic drug let alone entire categories of drugs. Unfortunately we currently are seeing major increases in antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections, and scientists agree that a major contributing factor to this imminent health care crisis is routine misuse of human antibiotics in industrial animal production. These increases are due largely to the continued administration of antibiotics to livestock and poultry on factory farms for weight gain and disease prevention (not to treat sickness in these animals). These drugs are the same drugs or classes of drugs used commonly in human medicine – penicillins, tetracyclines, sulfonamides, and more.

Often these human antibiotics are administered to entire herds or flocks at low doses in daily feed or water for the animals' entire lives. Prolonged bacterial exposure to low doses of antibiotics increases resistance to those drugs and makes the bacteria harder to kill. This problem then contributes to a health care crisis, because of the lack of effective antibiotics to treat infectious diseases and the need to devote resources to develop new antibiotics.

Because people can pick up drug-resistant bacteria: 1) by eating or handling contaminated meat, 2) through contact with soil and water polluted with animal farm waste, 3) breathing air emitted from factory farms, or 4) by eating crops that have been fertilized with contaminated manure. The problem of resistance grows quickly from there, because bacteria can transfer resistance genes easily to each other so that bacteria resistant to some drugs used in food animals can become resistant to other similar drugs or to whole classes of drugs.

The Ohio Public Health Association is Ohio's oldest and largest public health association and the only public health association in Ohio that speaks for the diverse field of public health. We are concerned currently there are minimal federal regulations in place to prevent the overuse of antibiotics in industrial farming. The Ohio Public Health Association strongly encourages you to support the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (H.R. 1549/S. 619). This legislation would limit the misuse of important human antibiotics in food animal production. Passage of the legislation will close a huge loophole in the efforts to stop further development of antibiotic resistant germs. It's time to act before our medications lose even more of their potency and we urge you to show leadership by supporting this bill.

Sincerely,

Rosemary V. Chaudry, PhD, MPH, RN  
President, Ohio Public Health Association