

Fewer antibiotics will be used on hog farms

HOW WE GOT AMERICA'S LARGEST FOOD SERVICE COMPANY TO TACKLE ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANT BACTERIA

From backyard barbecues to ham and eggs, pork is one of America's favorite foods. But the pork that arrives at your table likely comes from an animal that was fed antibiotics for much of its life, contributing to the upward trend in antibiotic resistant bugs in people.

Environmental Defense set out to change all that with partner company Compass Group. Compass is the world's largest food service company, feeding millions of people through catering businesses, restaurant services and cafeterias for clients like IBM and the Chicago public school system.

"Environmental Defense came to us with a compelling case for how we could lead the industry in reducing antibiotic overuse in agriculture," said Dave McGinnis, vice president for strategic culinary initiatives at Compass, "and now we are seeing that idea become a reality."

With Compass, we developed the first corporate policy limiting antibiotic use in pork production. The policy requires both poultry and pork suppliers not to use medically important antibiotics as growth promoters in animals they raise from birth. To ensure an ample supply of meat, we met with Compass's main pork supplier, industry giant Smithfield Foods and found that they were already on the road to reducing antibiotics use.

Scientists estimate that up to 70% of antibiotics in the United States are fed to farm animals, mostly to promote growth and compensate for stressful conditions. This unnecessary use enables bacteria,

such as the ones that cause food poisoning, to become resistant to the drugs doctors depend on for treatment. And because bacteria readily swap genes, that resistance can be transferred to a vast array of bacteria. The Centers for Disease Control deems antibiotic resistance "a top priority." But the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) cumbersome legal mecha-

nisms can take up to 20 years to remove an unsafe drug from the market.

LEADING BUSINESSES SPUR CHANGE

To secure faster action, we deployed a proven Environmental Defense strategy: enlisting market leaders to help us spark industry change. We began by developing poultry purchasing agreements with McDonald's in 2003. Next we targeted pork, the heaviest user of medically important antibiotics as feed additives. "The pork industry is hard to change because purchasers generally don't buy the whole animal," explains our project manager Millie Chu Baird. "If a company wants to buy only bacon, the producer has little incentive to alter its production practices."

Fortunately, we already had a dialogue going with the nation's largest pork producer. Our North Carolina office had helped craft an agreement where Smithfield and other pork producers would implement less polluting ways to treat hog waste. When we approached Smithfield with Compass at our side, Smithfield agreed to supply pork that meets Compass's requirements.

In an industry that remains largely in denial over the dangers of antibiotic overuse, Smithfield's position is precedent setting. "Reducing antibiotic use makes



Randy Farris/Corbis

When antibiotics fail, it is the children who suffer most.

A tough negotiator on food safety



When Becky Goldberg chose ecology, chickens weren't high on her list of favorite wildlife. But she became concerned about the impacts of agriculture while doing Ph.D. research in Minnesota.

Today she is an internationally recognized expert on the environmental and health

issues surrounding food production, helping the USDA develop organic standards, advising the National Academy of Sciences and conducting cutting-edge research on fish farming. To broker our antibiotics agreements with McDonald's and Compass, Goldberg got down in the dirt with suppliers. "Becky knows the science and just keeps pushing," says our Alliances director Gwen Ruta. "I wouldn't negotiate without her."

sense for our business and for our customers,” said Dennis Tracey, vice president for environmental, community and government affairs at Smithfield.

But voluntary actions alone won't solve the problem, so our team is leading efforts to change federal policy. In April, Environmental Defense, the American Academy of Pediatrics and others petitioned FDA to ban the use of medically important antibiotics in animal feed. And

the American Medical Association and nearly 300 other groups have joined us in supporting the bipartisan Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act, which would end use of medically important antibiotics as feed additives unless FDA finds they are safe. To get state and local leaders into the act, we released *Resistant Bugs and Antibiotic Drugs*, the first study ever to estimate local antibiotic use.

“Antibiotics have saved countless

lives over the past generation. We need to ensure they have the power to protect the next generation,” says our attorney Karen Florini.



WHAT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY CAN DO: You can help preserve the power of antibiotics by not taking them for viral infections like the flu. For more on antibiotics in medicine, visit www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/.

Find out how many antibiotics are used in your area at www.environmentaldefense.org/go/antibiotic.estimate

How resistant bacteria can get from farms to people

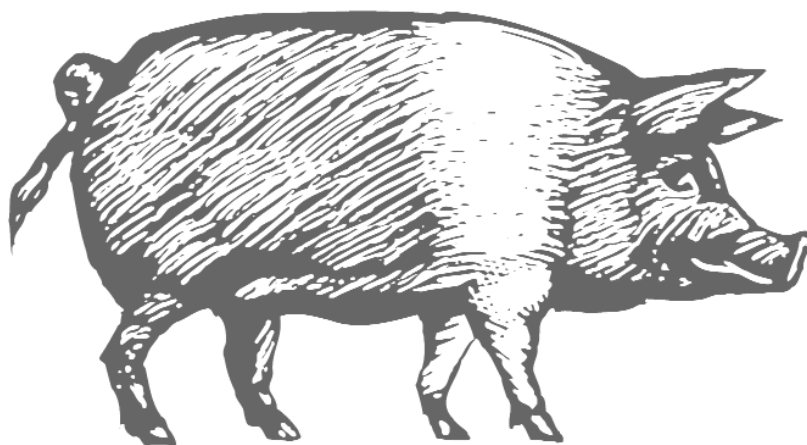
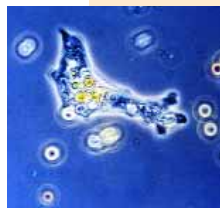
Each year across the United States, an estimated 26.5 million pounds of antibiotics are fed to farm animals, seven times the amount prescribed to humans. Such uses promote the development and spread of illnesses that are difficult to treat.

People are most likely to come into contact with resistant bacteria by eating undercooked meat, but the bacteria can also contaminate air, water and soil. People living near industrial-style farms may be at greater risk of exposure.

Too many drugs. An estimated 69% of the medically important antibiotics used in animal feed is administered to hogs.



Resistance develops. When regularly dosed with human antibiotics, bacteria become resistant to them—and can transfer the resistance genes to other kinds of bacteria.



Natural carriers. Bacteria can be transferred to other locations by birds, rodents, insects and other wildlife, as well as by wind and water.



Direct link to humans. Consumers can be exposed to resistant bacteria if meat is not properly cooked or if the bacteria are spread during food preparation to kitchen surfaces or utensils.



The problem spreads. Multi-drug resistant bacteria have been found in the air and in groundwater around animal farms. Contaminated water can flow into lakes and rivers that are used for swimming and fishing, and into drinking water wells.

