



PASSAGE *to* SUCCESS

FARM BUREAU - CONFRONTING THE ISSUES

Public and Animal Health Interactions **AFBF Policy Development** **May 2009**

Issue: Legislative and regulatory attempts to restrict antibiotic use in food animal production are increasing. Coupled with a host of other issues related to the links between food production and animal health, these efforts indicate increasing public awareness and concern with potential interactions of veterinary practices and human health.

Background: The use of pharmaceuticals for livestock is being held responsible for everything from early puberty in children to the prevalence of the MRSA (“staph” bacteria resistant to antibiotics). Advocates of current bills in Congress seeking to regulate antibiotic use in livestock cite the chance of interactions between drug use in livestock and human health as reason enough to regulate. Despite a lack of evidence connecting the two, a sizable portion of the population has become convinced of the link.

Certain diseases that have been proven to affect both human beings and animals, such as tuberculosis, have the potential to be passed from one species to another through either direct or indirect physical contact. For example, a farm or ranch employee who is exposed to TB might be able to pass the disease along to another human through the food animals he or she handles.

The H₁N₁ Flu Virus is the latest example. Other diseases, such as Johne’s disease in cattle and Crohn’s disease in humans, appear similar but no links have been scientifically proven. Nevertheless, as with the antibiotic resistance argument, some people are ready to indict without evidence. Demand for most meat, milk, and egg products are weak enough at present without having to fight lingering product questions, real or imagined.

Questions:

Do existing AFBF policies deal thoroughly with the interactions between animal health and public health?

If research reveals evidence that specific human-to-animal disease transmissions are possible, should regulations require farmers and ranchers support to control possible disease transmission to humans?

Should operators and/or employees on the farm and ranch, who work with animals whose meat or milk will be consumed by the public, be tested for

infectious agents (zoonotic diseases) with the potential for transmitting between animals and humans, such as tuberculosis?

As opinion in the medical community remains divided and scientific research is inconclusive as to the transmission of many human diseases where should grassroots producers concentrate their efforts to promote consumer confidence in the food they eat?

Related Farm Bureau Policy:

Policy 175 – Biosecurity

Lines 62-66: We recommend necessary USDA funding to focus on the protection of our food, fiber, water supply and critical industrial agricultural materials. We recommend that all farmers and public agencies recognize the importance of adopting biosecurity measures.

Policy 308 – Livestock and Poultry Health

Lines 184-189: Since brucellosis is a dangerous disease agent transmittable from wildlife to domestic livestock and humans, we support the enactment of a mechanism and the appropriation of funds to require federal agencies in custody of wildlife to compensate livestock owners and other aggrieved entities for actual expenses and losses brought about by conflicts from wildlife when such losses can be substantiated.

Lines 223-225: We urge more research and education on the impact of Lyme's disease and other diseases carried by the wildlife population on animals and humans.

Policy 339 – Food Quality and Safety

Lines 18-20: (We support:) The use of modern technology in the processing and the handling of food to assure food safety and to promote consumer confidence in the food supply.