

OPINION

The War on Antibiotics

Get smart on how we use them

BY BEN LILLISTON



Would you like some antibiotic-resistant bacteria with your grilled chicken at your backyard barbeque? Of course not. But that likelihood continues to grow unless the government makes industry change the way most American farm animals are raised.

American industrial animal production has fed our farm animals a steady diet of antibiotics for decades. Now, the bacteria are fighting back and we're all paying the price.

An estimated 70 percent of all antibiotics (about 24.6 million pounds a year) consumed in this country are used non-therapeutically to help promote growth in our pigs, chickens, and cattle in overcrowded pens known as "confined animal feeding operations." Without antibiotics added to their feed, disease would rap-

idly infect these animals.

In these factory farms, bacteria are exposed to low levels of antibiotics for long periods of time. That provides ideal conditions for the creation of bacterial resistance. Many of the antibiotics used to raise factory-farmed animals are the same prescription drugs that doctors use to treat sick humans. Now, antibiotic resistance developed for the farm animals are becoming a public health problem for us all.

The medical community has taken strong steps to reduce the over-prescription of antibiotics to humans to slow the development of these superbugs. But we can't win this battle without a similar effort by meat and poultry companies.

Antibiotic resistance is already proving costly--at least \$4 to \$5 billion a year in health costs alone, according to an estimate from The National Academy of Sciences. With few new antibiotics

on the horizon, protecting what we have is essential.

After dragging its feet for years, the government has finally taken the first timid steps to address this crisis. The Food and Drug Administration published in June a draft of new guidelines for the meat and poultry industry. The agency outlined a set of principles calling for the use of antibiotics to be limited to treating animal disease and to include veterinary oversight. FDA officials said these voluntary guidelines laid the groundwork for possible future regulations. Unfortunately, the agency sets no timeline for future regulations, which could be years, even decades, in the making.

To protect America's health, Congress must accelerate action to protect antibiotics. More than 80 of the nation's public health organizations, including the American Medical Association and the American Public Health Association, have endorsed a bill that would halt the overuse of antibiotics in raising food ani-

mals. The bill, introduced by the only microbiologist in Congress, Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y., would phase out the non-therapeutic use of seven classes of antibiotics in animals--unless the FDA determines the drugs do not contribute to antibiotic resistance affecting humans. The modest bill would still allow farmers to treat sick animals and it only covers antibiotics also used to treat humans.

But the big drug and meat companies represent a powerful lobby in Washington, and have thus far blocked the bill and FDA action. Why are they expending such effort to prevent this major public health initiative? As usual, it has to do with the bottom line. Banning antibiotics for healthy animals raised in extremely crowded conditions would mean that chicken, cattle and pigs would require more room. The cost of producing beef, pork, and chicken would likely rise--although it would be nothing compared to the health costs linked

to antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. We can raise enough animals for food and still protect the effectiveness of antibiotics. Denmark, the world's largest pork exporter, banned antibiotic feed additives in 1998. Producers improved animal husbandry and hygiene, and the overall use of antibiotics in agriculture dropped by over 50 percent. A similar ban is now in place in the rest of Europe. And of course many American farmers in the U.S. already use these more sustainable practices, producing pork, chicken and livestock without antibiotics.

Nearly all of us have needed antibiotics at some point in our lives. If we want antibiotics to work for us and our children in the future, we have to get smarter about how we use them. We need to find the political will to act.

Ben Lilliston is co-author of the book *Genetically Engineered Foods: A Self-Defense Guide for Consumers*.

College Grads Dwindling

U.S. falls behind other nations

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

For decades, American's young adults obtained more college degrees than those in other countries. Today, the U.S. college graduation rate ranks 12th out of 36 developed nations.

The U.S.'s inability to produce more college graduates isn't just a threat to the future of our young people: it could, if not remedied, weaken the country's ability to compete in a global marketplace.

Only 40 percent of young Americans 25 to 34 have at least an associate degree, compared to 56 percent of young adults in Canada, the world leader in college graduation rates. For people of color, the college completion rate is even lower: only 30 percent

of blacks and 20 percent of Latinos 25 to 34 have an associate degree or higher.



College graduates earn more over the course of their lifetime than those who only have a high school diploma. This extra money not only results in a better standard of living for degree holders but also includes a benefit for the American economy. If fewer people finish college, the result will be less revenue generated through property, income and other taxes.

Last year, President Obama announced the College Grad Initiative, which called for five million more college graduates by 2020. Strong in theory, we need to hear more on how and when this plan will be funded and implemented.

To ensure our young people travel smoothly from pre-school to college to college graduation, we need to monitor and assist

them every step of the way through public, private and community partnerships.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has pledged \$110 million towards improving remedial programs at community colleges to ensure those students have the support they need to complete their education. More philanthropic organizations must step up the way Gates did and work locally and nationally, at the elementary, high school and college levels, to ensure students have the academic and social tools they need to succeed in school. Additionally, the government must fully fund education support programs; an idea without dollars behind it is useless.

There has been much talk lately about investing in America. The best way to do that is to invest in our young people.

Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court Judge and syndicated television judge.

Class of 1970 40th Reunion



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We need your help locating other classmates
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Saturday August 7th, 2010: Embassy Suites Portland Airport Hotel
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