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Contact: Zach Goldberg, 202-478-6171

zgoldberg@mrss.com

KEEP ANTIBIOTICS WORKING HAILS REINTRODUCTION OF VITAL ANTIBIOTICS PROTECTION LEGISLATION

*Rep. Slaughter's "Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act" would
protect the public health by curbing routine overuse in healthy animals*

Washington, D.C. – Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW), a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, animal welfare, and other advocacy groups, today announced its strong support for the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA), introduced by Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (D-NY). The legislation is vital to protecting the public health and reducing the growing threat of antibiotic resistant bacteria.

PAMTA would address shortcomings in the federal response to the antibiotic resistance crisis by requiring the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to phase out the use of medically important antibiotics in food animals that are not sick. The legislation only covers antibiotics used in food animals that are also important for human health. Most of these drugs were approved for use in animals decades ago, before there was a clear understanding of resistance concerns, and many have never been evaluated for safety with respect to antibiotic resistance. The bill exempts from the phase-out any use of an antibiotic that the FDA determines to be safe with respect to antibiotic resistance.

“In the face of the antibiotic resistance crisis, we cannot afford to be standing still, as the FDA and Congress tragically have been doing for the past few decades. We need strong action to combat the overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture, and passage of this legislation would be a vital step,” said Richard Wood, Chair of Keep Antibiotics Working.

Data released earlier this year by the FDA showed that for the second year in a row, sales of penicillins and tetracyclines for use in food producing animals increased. Sales rose from 11.5 million pounds in 2009 to 14.4 million pounds in 2011. In addition to being important in human medicine, penicillins and tetracyclines are the most commonly used antibiotics in food producing animals.

The data underscore the need for strong action to address the overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture. Such use helps drive an epidemic of superbug infections in people, including those coming from food.

The bulk of medically important antibiotics sold in the U.S. (over 70 percent) are for use in food producing animals. This use leads to the contamination of food and the environment with resistant bacteria, which can cause longer and more difficult to treat illnesses and increase the risk of dying from infection. As the World Economic Forum recently reported, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in both human medicine and in livestock is creating the real threat that once easily treatable infections will no longer respond to antibiotic therapy.

Because of concerns about resistance, the FDA announced a plan last year to seek voluntary industry action on antibiotic overuse. However, this announcement followed the FDA officially dropping longstanding proposals to withdraw its approval for the use of tetracyclines and penicillins in animal feed because those uses had not been shown to be safe. A federal judge last year ordered the FDA to reverse its decision and withdraw the drugs. The FDA has since appealed that decision.

“At the end of the day, the FDA’s option of trusting pharmaceutical companies to voluntarily reduce sales of their own products seems foolhardy,” said David Wallinga, M.D., with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and a member of Keep Antibiotics Working. “Congress must intervene to stop the wasting of these precious drugs before it is too late, and passing this legislation would be a vital step.”

Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) is a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane, and other advocacy groups with more than 11 million supporters.

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