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## **NEW FDA DATA SHOW CONTINUED HIGH LEVEL OF ANTIBIOTICS USE ON FARMS**

*Routine overuse of antibiotics – including penicillins and tetracyclines – in animal agriculture a primary cause of increasing “superbug” infections coming from food*

Washington, D.C. – Data released yesterday by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (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 were released as a requirement of the Animal Drug User Fee Act (ADUFA), which Congress is set to reauthorize in 2013. Congressional debate about the reauthorization has begun, and includes how to improve existing provisions related to addressing antibiotic resistance.

According to Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) – a coalition of organizations dedicated to reducing the overuse of antibiotics in food producing animals – the latest 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.

“In the face of the antibiotic resistance crisis, we cannot afford to be standing still. We need strong action to combat the overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture,” said Steven Roach, Public Health Program Director at Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT) and a member of Keep Antibiotics Working. “The FDA needs to use all the tools it has available to begin rolling back this massive use of antibiotics.”

According to the data, sales of other medically important drugs for food producing animals also increased in 2011, but were offset by a drop in use of one class of drugs, sulfonamides. Due to the latter, overall sales of medically important antibiotics essentially stayed the same (20.8 million pounds of medically important antibiotics sold) from 2010 to 2011.

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 that can lead to difficult-to-treat illness in people and

animals. 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.

KAW calls on the FDA to take stronger action to reduce this overuse. For instance, KAW has urged the FDA and Congress to support reforms to strengthen ADUFA as it relates to antibiotics. KAW recommends that Congress strengthen the existing antibiotic sales data collection and reporting requirements in ADUFA; require the FDA to give periodic reports on its voluntary plan to reduce antibiotic overuse; and require some ADUFA funds be allocated to review the safety of animal agriculture uses of antibiotic drugs approved years ago. Unfortunately, the FDA's initial proposal laid out at a public meeting in December 2012 fails to include any of these recommendations.

“Because the antibiotics involved are so important to human patients, Congress needs to strengthen ADUFA to require public reporting of data to verify that the pharmaceutical companies will do what the FDA now says they will do,” said David Wallinga, M.D., with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and a member of Keep Antibiotics Working. “At the end of the day, trusting pharmaceutical companies to voluntarily reduce sales of their own products seems foolhardy.”

KAW also continues to urge Congress to pass legislation that would address the shortcomings in the federal response and reduce antibiotic resistance by phasing out the use of medically important antibiotics in food animals that are not sick.

*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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