



Animal Welfare Institute

P.O. Box 3650 Washington, DC 20027-0150 www.awionline.org

telephone: (202) 337-2332 facsimile: (888) 260-2271

Position Statement on the Use of Antibiotics in Animals Raised for Food

Intensive confinement operations (“factory farms”) administer low doses of antibiotics to farm animals for two reasons: 1) to increase feed efficiency and promote growth and 2) to suppress disease in animals who are not yet sick but who are kept in stressful and unhealthy conditions where disease is likely to occur. This sub-therapeutic use of antibiotics presents a serious human health concern. Low-level dosing of livestock and poultry with antibiotics that are identical or related to drugs used in human medicine has been demonstrated to be the largest cause of multidrug-resistant infections in people.

However, while the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) is opposed to routine use of antibiotics for growth promotion, it supports their use when indicated to treat disease. Untreated illness can cause pain and suffering to animals. Food marketing programs that prohibit all uses of antibiotics, even for therapeutic purposes, may result in an animal not being properly treated for an illness in order to preserve the option of sending the animal to market.

Animal Welfare Approved, AWI’s high-welfare, food certification program, prohibits the use of sub-therapeutic antibiotics while requiring the treatment of sick or injured animals, with antibiotics if indicated. The program’s standards include the following requirements in regards to antibiotics:

- Any sick or injured animals on the farm must be treated immediately to minimize pain and distress. This must include veterinary treatment if required.
- Homeopathic, herbal or other non-antibiotic alternative treatments are preferred.
- If alternative treatments are not suitable or not effective or if a veterinarian has recommended antibiotic treatment, this must be administered.
- Withholding treatment in order to preserve an animal’s eligibility for market is prohibited. *Note: Finding untreated injured or ill animals may be grounds for removal from the program.*
- Animals treated with an antibiotic must not be slaughtered or used to produce milk for the *Animal Welfare Approved* program before a period of time has passed that is at least twice the licensed withdrawal period of the antibiotic used.
- The sub-therapeutic and/or non-therapeutic use of antibiotics, or any other medicines, to control or prevent disease or promote growth, is prohibited.