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Antibiotic Use in Food Animals Symposium Establishes New Benchmark for Information, Science

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO— Researchers and experts in animal health and human health shared scientific and thought-provoking information that elicited numerous “a-hah’s” from participants of the “Antibiotic Use in Food Animals: A Dialogue for a Common Purpose” symposium, Oct. 26-27, in Chicago. Sponsored by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture, the symposium proved to be a two-way dialogue, with attendees asking pointed questions and adding to the discussions.

“The symposium established a new benchmark of valuable information and science that can be used to further communicate valid and essential facts to animal agriculture producers as well as consumers regarding the use of antibiotics in food animal production,” states Dr. Leonard Bull who served as Planning Committee Chair for the symposium. “Divergent opinions were openly expressed, and areas of consensus were developed.

“If the symposium was summarized in just two words, those words would probably be ‘dynamic’ and ‘eye-opening.’ I can’t remember when I obtained so much good information in a 24-hour period.”

Human health and animal health experts agreed that the judicious use of antibiotics in food animals is sometimes required to provide safe, nutritious food at a reasonable price, and that the prevention of infectious disease improves animal health and human health.

“Antibiotics is one of the technological tools that can be used to ensure affordable food,” stated Dr. Tom Shryock, Senior Research Advisor of Microbiology, Elanco Animal Health. In his “Initiatives to Ensure Public Health, Food Safety, Animal Health and Welfare of Antibiotic Use in Food Animals” presentation, Shryock pointed out that the public’s concern regarding antibiotic use in food animals has presented a conundrum to veterinarians. After all, every graduate entering the veterinary profession swears an oath not only to protect animal health but also welfare and to not only relieve animal suffering but to prevent it. And that today can require the use of antibiotics in food animals.

Speaker after speaker made it clear that the use of antibiotics in food animal production is a complex issue that is often over-simplified by consumer media trying to make the topic understandable to readers and listeners. Unfortunately, this simplified presentation of a complex issue often results in the public being misled and misperceptions take root.

Numerous messages delivered by the 13 animal health and human health experts centered on the hot topic of antibiotic resistance. Information shared included:

- Using an antibiotic—or using more of it—will not necessarily cause resistance to that antibiotic to appear or to increase from current levels. Likewise, ceasing to use an antibiotic—or using less of it—will not necessarily cause resistance to that antibiotic to disappear or decrease from current levels.
- Concern about resistance is used as ammunition for other agendas, and the arguments assume a vacuum in which no new drugs are developed.
- There's much the human health community doesn't know about why antibiotic resistance occurs. As such, antibiotics should be used appropriately—and as little as possible—not only in animal agriculture but also in the human population.

"Antibiotic use in animal agriculture is not a black-and-white issue. If it was an easy issue to understand and explain, we would have solved it a long time ago. That said, we in animal agriculture need to get in the same boat and row together—across species," stated Mike Lormore, Director of Dairy Veterinary Operations for Pfizer Animal Health, in the symposium's final presentation "Reaching Out to Consumers."

Lormore underscored the importance of the animal agriculture industry building trust with consumers by consistently and effectively communicating and demonstrating its food safety commitment to the food chain. He stressed that consumers want and deserve information regarding on-farm production practices.

Emphasizing that "no one cares what you know until they know that you care," he advised individuals to provide friends, family and other consumers with information that pairs science with true compassion.

Lormore said messages to consumers should center on four key facts:

- Farm animals are under the care of licensed veterinarians.
- Vaccines are used to protect animals from various illnesses.
- Sick animals are treated with medicines, such as antibiotics, to restore their health, and protections are in place to ensure that their meat and milk is safe for people.
- If medicine such as an antibiotic is administered to help sick animals, then their meat or dairy products are not allowed to enter the food supply until the medicine has sufficiently cleared the animal's system.

Presentations by the speakers are available online at www.animalagriculture.org. Topics covered include the changing landscape of antibiotics, antibiotic resistance and antibiotic product development; human health implications relative to antibiotic use; government regulatory oversight and risk mitigation; livestock MRSA; and connecting with consumers. A white paper is being developed and will be available online at NIAA's website as well.

[Click here](#) to listen to an audio clip from Mike Bumgarner, Vice President, Center for Food and Animal Issues, Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, as well as NIAA Executive Committee member as he summarizes the symposium in 60 seconds. (mp3)

The National Institute for Animal Agriculture provides a forum for building consensus and advancing proactive solutions for animal agriculture—the beef, dairy, swine, sheep, goats, equine and poultry industries—and provides continuing education and communication linkages for animal agriculture professionals. NIAA is dedicated to programs that work toward the eradication of disease that pose risk to the health of animals, wildlife and humans; promote a safe and wholesome food supply for our nation and abroad; and promote best practices in environmental stewardship, animal health and well-being. NIAA members represent all facets of animal agriculture.

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