Hold the Antibiotics: McDonald’s

McDonald’s raises the bar for responsible antibiotic use in beef

The Big Mac is taking a big bite out of the overuse of antibiotics.

In December, McDonald’s released a new policy to restrict medically important antibiotics in its beef supply chain. It will monitor antibiotic use in its top 10 global beef sourcing markets and set reduction targets by the end of 2020.

Whether you eat at McDonald’s or not, this is an important step forward for public health. We rely on antibiotics to treat life-threatening infections and to ensure that surgery, chemotherapy and other medical procedures are safe. But the overuse of antibiotics is leading to the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, called “superbugs,” that are now shaking the foundations of modern medicine.

“The Golden Arches just raised the bar for responsible antibiotic use in meat production,” said Matt Wellington, director of our national Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign. “McDonald’s new commitment is a promising step forward that will help preserve antibiotics for the future, and that’s something we should all be happy about.”

Misuse of antibiotics is one of the biggest threats to global health today

While overuse in medical settings is a factor in the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, industrialized livestock operations—like the ones that supply McDonald’s beef—play an outsized role in this looming public health threat.

A staggering 70 percent of medically important antibiotics are sold for use in livestock and poultry operations here in the United States. These drugs are routinely given to animals to help them survive crowded, stressful and unsanitary conditions, regardless of whether the animals are actually sick.

The stakes couldn’t be higher. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conservatively estimates that at least 2 million Americans are sickened and 23,000 die each year as a direct result of antibiotic-resistant infections. However, recent estimates suggest more than 150,000 Americans died of antibiotic-resistant infections in 2010.

The World Health Organization has called antibiotic resistance “one of the biggest threats to global health, food security and development today.”

Commitments from McDonald’s, KFC, Subway and more

We shouldn’t allow the meat industry to misuse our life-saving medicines just to make cows a little fatter and burgers a little cheaper.

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PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG

One year after Equifax data breach, here’s everything you need to know

One year after announcing the biggest data breach in history, Equifax still hasn’t been held accountable or provided the information and tools consumers need to adequately protect themselves. That’s why Illinois PIRG is stepping in.

On Sept. 7, 2018—the one year anniversary of the public announcement of the Equifax data breach—Illinois PIRG Education Fund released a report detailing the government’s failure to hold the company accountable and offering tips for consumers to protect themselves. The report also concludes that both oversight and financial consequences are needed to prevent future large-scale breaches.

“We’re particularly proud of this report, where we’ve put together tips for preventing, detecting and resolving different types of identity theft and fraud, all in one place,” said Mike Litt, our national consumer campaign director. Visit bit.ly/EquifaxBreachOneYearLater to read the full report.

Illinois PIRG’s Consumer Watchdog program will continue to protect consumers and alert them to the tools they need to protect themselves from identity thieves.

HOLD THE ANTIBIOTICS

Illinoisans are clamoring to preserve our life-saving antibiotics

A bill introduced in 2018 by then-state Sen. Daniel Biss to limit the use of antibiotics on factory farms received amplified recognition in the wake of Illinois PIRG Education Fund’s report, “Chain Reaction IV,” which highlighted the issue in fast food sourcing markets.

Two months after the report’s release, McDonald’s announced that it will monitor antibiotic use in its top 10 global beef sourcing markets and set reduction targets by the end of 2020. This is a great first step, but Illinois wants to stop the routine use of medically important antibiotics on all farms across the state.

“This bill goes above and beyond federal guidelines that fail to prohibit the use of routine antibiotics on factory farms, including on animals that aren’t even sick,” said Illinois PIRG State Director Abe Scarr. “Illinois can join Maryland and California as a leader when it comes to protecting our life-saving medicines.”

Illinois PIRG is working hard to keep antibiotics effective for future generations.

21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

Electric buses are the future. Here’s how to pay for them

Dirty, unhealthy and expensive, diesel buses embody transportation’s past. Electric buses are the future.

Not only are electric buses cleaner than their diesel-powered predecessors, according to a report released Oct. 30, 2018, by U.S. PIRG Education Fund, transit agencies and school districts also have affordable options to adopt them. These include municipal bonds in addition to the lifetime fuel and maintenance savings of electric school buses, which the report estimates to be around $170,000 per bus.

“Each day, millions of Americans, and millions of our children, get on diesel-powered buses that emit toxic fumes that make them sick,” said Matt Casale, director of our national network’s transportation campaign. “We have a better option: the zero-tailpipe emission, all-electric bus. We all deserve cleaner air.”

The report recommends that transit agencies and school districts commit to transitioning their fleets from diesel to all-electric by 2030.

Our mission

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, Illinois PIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. Illinois PIRG’s mission is to deliver persistent, results-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

Read more updates on our work at http://illinoispig.org
McDonald’s raises the bar for responsible antibiotic use in beef

For years, Illinois PIRG and our national network have called on major restaurants, including McDonald’s, to take action. And our advocacy helped persuade McDonald’s to stop serving chicken raised on our life-saving medicines in 2015—a commitment that helped push chicken supplier Tyson Foods to start raising its chickens without routine antibiotics.

KFC, Subway and other restaurants and suppliers quickly followed suit, and we estimate that soon nearly half of all chicken in this country will be raised without the routine use of medically important antibiotics.

McDonald’s newest commitment to reduce the routine use of medically important antibiotics in its beef supply is the culmination of over a year’s work by Illinois PIRG and our coalition partners.

More than 80 international stakeholders, including health, environmental and consumer groups, called on McDonald’s to act. We organized top medical professionals across the country to speak out about the health risks, and our national network delivered more than 150,000 petition signatures to McDonald’s headquarters during its annual shareholder meeting.

Setting off a chain reaction

In October 2018, Illinois PIRG Education Fund held an event outside of McDonald’s headquarters to release the collaborative “Chain Reaction IV” report grading the top 25 U.S. burger chains on their antibiotics policies.

McDonald’s received an “F” in the report, and later responded that the company would release a global antibiotics policy for its beef by the end of the year.

Today, we’re pleased that McDonald’s followed through on its pledge to take the next step in restricting antibiotics use. As the largest purchaser of beef in the U.S., McDonald’s action could spark an industry-wide change as the beef industry will now have to meet McDonald’s—and consumers’—demands to reduce the routine use of antibiotics in beef.

With McDonald’s taking an important step in the right direction, Illinois PIRG will continue to work with the burger chain that’s served billions to set strong reduction targets by the end of 2020.

“Consumers called on McDonald’s to hold the antibiotics,” said Matt. “Its response shows progress, and we look forward to seeing the company continue to use its size for good when it comes to preserving life-saving antibiotics.”

By Matt Wellington, director
Campaign to Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics

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Ban Roundup

Jury finds Monsanto’s Roundup responsible for man’s terminal cancer

Monsanto has been held accountable for hiding the health risks of Roundup in a California courtroom.

In August 2018, a jury awarded millions in damages to Dewayne Johnson, a former school groundskeeper who claimed his terminal non-Hodgkin lymphoma was caused by years of using the herbicide Roundup. Twenty-six million pounds of Roundup are sprayed on school grounds, parks and gardens every year, and Johnson’s case was the first to go to trial of more than 800 patients suing Monsanto.

“I would never have sprayed that product on school grounds or around people if I knew it would cause harm,” Johnson testified. His lawyer said, “We were finally able to show the jury the secret, internal Monsanto documents proving that Monsanto has known for decades that ... Roundup could cause cancer.”

As the evidence against Roundup piles up, Illinois PIRG is working to protect our public health by banning the herbicide in Illinois.

Dear Illinois PIRG member,

This winter, Illinois PIRG and our national network celebrated when McDonald’s announced it would cut routine antibiotic use in its beef supply chain. It’s a welcome victory for public health and it wouldn’t have been possible without the support of members like you.

Thank you,

Abe Scarr, State Director
info@illinoispirg.org

Thanks to you