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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21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

Discussing our clean energy future with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee

We’re working to lead Wisconsin into a clean future. In October, WISPIRG had a unique opportunity to host a clean energy tour and roundtable discussion with Washington Governor Jay Inslee in Green Bay. The governor is a leading voice for public transit, electric vehicles and for renewable energy policies.

“Wisconsin still has a long way to go to create a clean and effective transportation system, and to reach 100 percent renewable energy,” said WISPIRG Director Peter Skopec. “But we also have plenty to be proud of. I’m looking forward to continuing our partnership with the amazing advocates, organizers and professionals who are working so hard for a clean energy future in Wisconsin.”

Together with our network partners at Wisconsin Environment, we recruited a wide range of participants to the roundtable, including solar energy professionals, members of the Green Bay Sustainability Commission and Brown County Board, clean energy leaders from the Oneida Nation and the National Indian Carbon Coalition, student leaders and clean energy educators, and more.

On Sept. 7, 2018—the one year anniversary of the public announcement of the Equifax data breach—WISPIRG Foundation 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.

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

21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

The road to clean transportation

Transportation is central to daily life in Wisconsin. But our transportation system isn’t working for many.

On Aug. 9, WISPIRG Foundation and advocates in Chicago released a report, “The Road to Clean Transportation.” The report found that for too long, transportation policy has encouraged driving and sprawl—making it harder for people to get around, and leading to harmful pollution.

“A better future is possible,” said WISPIRG Foundation Director Peter Skopec. “By switching to electric cars and buses, rethinking the design of our cities and towns, looking to new technologies and doubling down on public transit, the Midwest can ensure that the transportation system we pass on to our children is clean and effective for all.”

Transportation shapes our communities, creates opportunities for advancement and growth, and impacts the quality of the air we breathe. WISPIRG Foundation and our national network are working toward a cleaner, healthier reality by advocating for proven and emerging tools to expand low-carbon transportation choices.

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

For years, WISPIRG 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 WISPIRG 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, WISPIRG Foundation 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, WISPIRG 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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Winter 2019
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, WISPIRG is working to protect our public health by banning the herbicide in Wisconsin.

Thanks to you

Dear WISPIRG member,

This winter, WISPIRG 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,

Peter Skopec, State Director
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