

Animal Health Institute
Making Food Safer: Examining the Role of Animal Medicines
November 3, 2011

Keynote Speech by Congressman Dennis Cardoza (D-CA)

Welcome to your capital. It's great to be here and with you all at the Animal Conference too. Thanks for inviting me to deliver the keynote address. I'm not sure exactly what that means, but I'll do my best to live up to the billing. I am, as has been said, the ranking member of the livestock, dairy, and poultry subcommittee, and I fully recognize the connection between animal health and medicine. My wife is a family doctor. And so, we have a lot of lively discussions in my house about organic agriculture during the last farm bill, and now in my current role, animal health and human health and the role that you have to combine and raise both standards in order to achieve the desired result.

Agriculture is absolutely vital to my hometown and my home state. As many of you know, I grew up in the San Joaquin Valley of California, where we produce the largest amount of dairy products in the country. California's dairy business generates \$63 billion in economic activity and over 443,000 full-time jobs in California in 2008. That's the last available statistic that we have. And I'm very proud of the fact that California milk exceeds the federal standards in the amount of protein, calcium, and other nutrition that it contains. But this doesn't happen by accident. California dairy men and women have very high standards for the health of their animals, and this translates into – translates into a very high-quality dairy product. I personally know how well producers treat their animals during the milk-production process, and how carefully that the milk is screened before it accepted at their processing plant. In fact, a sample from every single tanker of milk is tested before the milk is unloaded for processing. Any screening tests were evaluated and approved by the FDA. Our animals in California would not be such healthy producers if it wasn't for the excellent care they receive and the responsible medicinal practices that their caregivers provide.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of misconceptions about the use of antibiotics and other medications in animals raised for food. Many of the current legislative proposals put forth in reaction to these complicated issues only exacerbate the problem. They are championed by people who don't fully understand agriculture, or don't understand the role that medicinal treatments can play in overall health in our food supply. In fact, at one of our – this isn't directly dealing with medicine, but it deals with people not knowing what they're doing and going on the farm.

Recently, at one of our hearings of the dairy, livestock, and poultry committee, we had a rancher testify that she was on the farm one day, and two people walked up coming out of a white sedan with a green seal on the side. And they were from EPA. And they demanded to see her facility that day, no appointment. Sought on, you know – demanded to go on her property. And they threatened her that if she didn't show them around her property that day, they were going to take her away in handcuffs. So she complied. Against her better judgment, she complied. And as she's taking these two fellows around her farm on the back of her – what do you call it? The four-wheeler that she had, like a golf cart. She was amazed to hear one of them tell the other, my god, I didn't believe – I couldn't – I can't believe that these animals are this big. This person that was regulating her facility had actually never before seen a real live cow up close and personal. So, we have to be careful about how we put forward regulations, and make sure that sound science is based on human practice and understanding, and that we get it right.

In fact, I think that Congress is actively – and has often been accused of creating many unintended consequences with an action, with the legislation they pass. Another example of this is the recently

passed food safety pro that was signed into law last year. Instead of codifying a risk-based system that would have made a lot of real strides in protecting consumers, provisions exempted large slots of producers from the food safety regulations. In fact, if you are a small farmer under a threshold. I think it's \$500,000. Or you live within 257 miles from the border. You don't have to comply with the same regulations that others in the industry do.

I supported strong food safety requirements when the bill went through – actually tougher food safety requirements in some of the bills that were in the bill. And in the end, I voted against it. And I was in the leadership at the time that it went through. And I said, what you're going to do is cost people lives, because you're exempting – people are going to rely – this food safety bill just passed Congress. They're going to think that their food just got safer. And in fact, there are exemptions where people can't be sure that the food has been made better if it comes from a small farmer or if it comes from an area close to the border.

Unfortunately those talk before policy situation plays out again and again on Capitol Hill, and is often promoted and trumpeted by the most extreme members of both parties. In last year's election, we saw a new face in people with these extreme views being elected to federal office. In fact, we saw significant loss in the moderates in Congress, like many of the blue dogs that – I am a member of the blue dog coalition. We are the conservative Democrats in Congress. And ironically, probably half of the people who are actually farmers in Congress, the small business people that knew the most about this, lost in the last election.

I myself grew up on a farm, brought those values to Congress, and have decided that after this term, I'm going to retire. And much of that is because middle of the road, moderate members were – have been replaced. And the new lawmakers that have come and replaced them are really good at standing on their soapbox and screaming, but the lack – in many cases, the real-world knowledge, in my opinion, to get the job done and to do it correctly. And the reaction in Congress has thus been obvious in my opinion. We have increasing divisiveness, brinkmanship, and obstruction as the rule of the day.

As I was saying, that I have recently announced my retirement, and this was mainly in – due to the fact that I think it's so difficult for us to get anything done here. Congress is an institution that I deeply respect and admire, except that – when it comes to these toxic turns in the environment that cause common sense and good ideas to go out the window. Further, I am very concerned – and it's one of the reasons why I'm happy to be here with you today – that there are too few substantive policy debates. And that those substantive policy discussions like you're going to engage in here today are oftentimes cast aside by news media that latches onto the loudest and the most destructive voice – voices – and promotes those voices in an attempt to increase ratings. This isn't the way to run the country.

And having an honest discussion amongst different factions with different opinions, and having members understand those policies and sharing those policies and that discourse with members, is really the best way to get good policy work done. It's never part of the story to talk about the intent, the good processes, or the procedures in place that prevented the worst situation to begin with. It just wouldn't bring that many new viewers to their shows. So, you are scrambling to clean up the messes with the hope that they will become larger public relations problems and won't cripple the industries that you represent. Like my mom used to say, one bad apple can spoil the whole bunch. And when you're dealing with issues like food safety, all you need is one bad apple to go out there. Not do the acceptable practices. And an entire industry, an entire segment of industry – be it melons this month, or peppers or tomatoes awhile back, or E. coli in beef. Whatever it is, it certainly can affect and devastate an entire

industry. This is a winner-take-all high-stakes environment, and it's important for this industry and all industries to celebrate, really, with an eye towards these future problems.

I'd like to leave you with two thoughts. Prevention is absolutely key. Get in front of it before you have a crisis. And second of all, base your decisions and your recommendations to Congress on science. Back it up with science, have your facts and figures ready. And hopefully, we will again be able to achieve sometime in the future a situation where people can rely on science, make their decisions based on science, and do the best thing for the American people first and foremost. Thank you very much for having me as your speaker today. I really appreciate the invitation. And I hope you have a great meeting and conference. Thank you.