

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

Introduction of Panelists by Philip Brasher, Gannett News Service

Phil Brasher: *Thanks to AHI for having me here. I must say, you are pretty brave to ask a reporter to moderate this. But I appreciate it. Hopefully it will be an enlightening discussion today. We're – I'm going to introduce each one of our five speakers one at a time. They will speak, and then we'll – I have questions for them. And then we'll open it up for questions after that. So, get your questions ready. Our first speaker is – I'm going in the order that it's on the program, not in the order that we – that you are at the table. Our first speaker is Sarah Klein. She is a staff attorney at the Center for Science and the Public Interest. If you remember, those of you who don't – aren't familiar with CSPI, it's a consumer efficacy group based here in Washington. And publishes a widely read newsletter, which I think helps fund the organization. She represents CSPI in commenting to the agriculture department and the FDA on food safety issues. And she's a member of USDA's national advisory committee on meat and poultry inspection.*

Sarah Klein, Staff Attorney for Food Safety Program, Center for Science in the Public Interest: *I was a little bit intimidated about that – being one of the only non-doctors on the panel. And also, at – some of my statements that I'll make. So I prepared formal remarks, so bear with me if I'm a little long-winded. So, the question I was asked to talk about is, what do consumers think about the intersection of animal medicines and food safety? And that led me to, what do consumers expect from their food? At a base, consumers expect to be eating food from healthy animals. They don't expect that their food is coming from animals that are existing in a perpetual state of either disease or discomfort. And unfortunately, conditions like overcrowding and growth promotion, lack of record-keeping systems, and the inadequacy of some of the regulatory programs that oversee animal food production are contributing to a sense for consumers that what we have is a wild, wild west of animal health and food production. And the fact is that what once was done in the past may not be acceptable to consumers any longer as they learn more about food issues.*

Food policy and food production is becoming more interesting to consumers for a variety of reasons. It's become kind of a pop culture phenomenon. And as they learn more, they may be surprised by some of the details of the realities of industrial food production. But they're certainly becoming a little more concerned about what's happening. What's happening on the farm. And the consumer wants, at its core, to know that the way that food is being produced is, forgive the pun, palatable. And I – and I say that because at CSPI, we are looking at a pendulum swinging. We've seen – on one side, we have kind of extreme industrial agriculture, where – and that is certainly not the norm in the industry. But we have extreme industrial agriculture on one end that has a lot of the attendant issues that I just mentioned about overcrowding, et cetera. On the other side of the equation, we have movements like knowing your farmer and going – getting most of your food from the farmer's market. Some of the small issues that we just heard about. And then we have fringe movements, like raw milk, and that carries its own severe issues.

Obviously what we're concerned about is that consumers who are eager to avoid one side of the pendulum – they're eager to avoid that industrial ag and all of the horror stories that they've heard are going to veer way too far to the other side, and we're going to end up with a lot more people who are interested in fringe movements. And we're seeing some growing popularity there. More in the middle of the spectrum, of course, are things like organic production, which is trying to balance more the needs

and desires of the consumer with the realities of animal production. And the parenthetical that I have to make here, of course, is that organic production doesn't have a relationship to food safety in terms of pathogens and bacteria. And so, I recognize that, and CSPI recognizes that.

But when I refer to organic production, I'm talking about animal medicines that we're discussing today. So, that's where we'd like to see the focus, is improving the systems that are existing in the center of that spectrum. Consumers want truly judicious use of animal medicines. They want medicines that are used to treat disease only, that are not used for growth promotion or for some therapeutic use. And they want truth and transparency in the labeling, where drug use is disclosed in a way that they can understand.

And they can use that information when they're making their purchasing decisions. Just as an aside, it's clear to us that consumers will pay for food that's produced in this way. We are watching a rise in the popularity of organic products. In 2010, 75% of U.S. families reported purchasing organic. That's more than ever before. And over 40% of them are saying that they're doing so because they're concerned about pesticides, hormones, and antibiotic use. We're even seeing big companies like Chipotle, which are advertising, marketing that they're not using animals that have antibiotics. And their stock is up 20% this year.

It's not just consumer attitudes that we're concerned with at CSPI. We have strong scientific benchmarks that tell us that animal health issues are causing food safety issues. I'd like to talk specifically and briefly about residue-monitoring programs for milk and for meat, and the rise in food-borne illness outbreaks that are linked to antibiotic-resistant pathogens. Beginning with residues, CSPI has recently begun tracking drug residues and tissue samples from dairy cow. The issues arising from that research are troubling, in part because they're revealing some substantive issues, but also because they're revealing great gaps in the data set itself. CSPI analyzed drug residues in dairy cattle, tissue samples at slaughter over a one-year period. And one year's worth of tissue samples revealed 800 drug residue violations. Four of the drugs that appeared repeatedly are on the World Health Organization's risk and critically important medicines for humans, and one that appeared frequently was – is an illegal drug, gentamicin. All of these drugs can have severe health consequences for people. And the data points to kind of a critical unanswered public health question, and that's what residues are present in milk and milk products. Because if you're looking at what's in the tissues, then what's actually in the dairy? And under the pasteurized milk ordinance, FDA is currently testing for only four of six specific drugs. Obviously there's a wealth of others that are out there.

And testing for so few drugs is kind of leaving a lot of questions unanswered. Then I'll just skip to, in terms of outbreaks linked to antibiotic-resistant pathogens, the data analyzed by CSPI provides a compelling basis for the assertion that we are seeing a rise in outbreaks linked to antibiotic-resistant pathogens. We used to say that antibiotic resistance was an emerging public health risk, and we now say it's an existing public health risk. The problem is here. Notably, even the data that leads to underlie that assumption is small.

Obviously we know that underreporting is a serious problem. But we're seeing a rise in outbreaks over the last decade, and a total of over 20,000 people who've been sickened thus far from antibiotic-resistant outbreaks that we know of. That's – almost 30 deaths are included in that number. A lot of those outbreaks are attributed to salmonella, and just as an important aside, CSPI recently petitioned the U.S. – the Department of Agriculture on four specific strains of antibiotic-resistant salmonella. We've asked that USDA declare those four strains to be adulterants under the law. That would position them along with E. coli, O157:H7, and the six other non-O157 STECs that were just named as adulterants as unfit for human consumption. And would necessitate a sampling program that would track for these pathogens.

And I do want to say, importantly, that such a declaration is well within the existing authority of USDA, and will not require any change in the law.

So, ultimately, just in closing, it's clear that more needs to be done to balance the needs of consumers with the realities of animal production. The growing public health concerns related to industrial production, including the issues that I just mentioned, can't be ignored. And we believe that what's needed is a paradigm shift in the way that we raise animals for food production. One that relieves overcrowding, that allows animals to behave naturally, and to grow normally throughout their lifecycle. And that treats food animals ethically and humanely. And we believe that the consumer deserves this, and the customer is demanding it. And public health depends on it.

Thank you.

Mr. Brasher: *Thank you. Next we have Dr. Beth Krushinskie. She is Director of Quality Assurance and Food Safety for Mountaire Farms, a large chicken processor based in Delaware. She is both a doctor in veterinary medicine as well as a PhD in veterinary – in microbiology. So maybe we can share one of those doctorates. She has held a variety of positions in the poultry industry, including with the U.S. Poultry and Egg Association, Hilton's Pride, Long For Foods, and Purdue Farms. And that's a big section of the industry. Go ahead.*

Dr. Beth Krushinskie, Director of Quality Assurance and Food Safety, Mountaire Farms: *Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in this forum today, and I want to thank AHI and Mr. Mathews for the opportunity. Mount Air Farms is – couldn't believe it too – is a set of the largest integrated broiler production company in the United States. We're based in Millsboro, Delaware. We have two plants in Delaware, one in North Carolina. We process about 5 million broilers a week. And the most – the majority of our product goes to store brand tray pack at the grocery store, or to further processing that is made into Healthy Choice meals, breaded chicken strips, Safeway – I mean, Safeway. Excuse me. Subway-type strips. We do not do any further processing. We are single-ingredient, all natural. Just fresh poultry products. And we also export to about 140 countries.*

I am the Director of Quality Assurance and Food Safety. We actually have a Director of Animal Health here. Dr. Don Ritter is in the audience. And we're responsible for both quality programs, food safety programs, animal welfare programs, animal health programs for the birds that we take care of. And then we're both board-certified poultry veterinarians, and we've both been in production for twenty years-plus. Actually Don's been in a little longer. And we take it very seriously. We care about our animals, we care about the quality and the safety of the product that we produce, and we try to do the best job we can to make sure that our customers receive affordable and safe meat protein for their diets.

We think it's very important, both for the U.S. and for other countries, primarily in the developing world, that depend on poultry meat for part of the protein in their diets. I guess I'll conclude with those. I didn't really have any prepared remarks today. I'm actually really interested in just being available for questions. And hopefully can give you some insight into what it – what we have to deal with on our side of the equation. And what we're trying to do, and the obstacles and some of the challenges that we face trying to meet the ever-evolving expectations. Thank you very much.

Mr. Brasher: *And next we have Dr. Guy Loneragan. He is a professor of food safety and public health at Texas Tech University, which I have to say is in my hometown of Lubbock. For you all that don't know it, Lubbock is at the bottom of the Texas panhandle, which is a huge – one of the largest beef cattle feeding areas probably in the world, certainly in the United States. And his research focuses on controlling a number of food-borne challenges in livestock reduction. Including toxin-producing E. coli, salmonella, and*

the issue of anti-microbial drug resistance. In addition to his appointment at Texas Tech, he serves as adjunct professor or affiliate faculty of a number of universities, including West Texas A&M, Kansas State University, and Texas A&M University.

Dr. Guy Loneragan, Professor of Food Safety and Public Health, Texas Tech University: *Thank you very much. I – I mean, thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to be here, to answer some questions and be available for questions as well. I am a veterinary epidemiologist, and my position is as professor of food safety and public health. But really, what I try to do is a research-focused position, where I get to work with a lot of really great thinkers from a variety of different disciplines. And together, we work to fill some knowledge gaps as it relates to E. coli O157 and its related bacteria, as well as salmonella, anti-microbial resistance, and animal health.*

But certainly, filling knowledge gaps is only half of the challenge. What we try to do as well is explore and evaluate potential solutions that we can implement in various livestock operations. And most of the ones that we work with are cattle livestock operations. Certainly identifying and evaluating solutions is not always as straightforward as what we would like to think it is. Primarily because the stakeholders who are responsible for implementing these solutions have to perceive the solutions as being implementable, being practical. And also that – they have to perceive that their adoption is advantageous. And this becomes a challenge, because when we think of the beef industry as an example, from producers to consumers, there are many stakeholders.

And oftentimes there's a lot of overlap of common thought, but then there are often times when there are disparate viewpoints. And these disparate viewpoints lead to – can lead to conflict. And anti-microbial drug use, anti-microbial resistance is a good example of that, where we have very distinct viewpoints that are deeply held and deeply valued. Sometimes these value viewpoints are very different, and may result in conflict.

And so our research group, the group that I get to work with – I'm very privileged to work with – we have taken a philosophy that we want to adopt the middle ground. And if you try and do that, you have to try and let go of your prejudices. But that is extremely hard, but you try. And you also try and understand the viewpoints of the competing stakeholders in the discussion, and try and understand how they arrived at those viewpoints. And then as you do that, you get to explore and evaluate solutions that may be acceptable and palatable to the variety of stakeholders in that group. So when we do that, we get to also potentially weigh some benefits and risks of certain practices, and ask the question, do the risks outweigh the benefit? Or do the benefit outweigh the risk? And that is the part that I really most enjoy about what we do. Thank you.

Mr. Brasher: *We'll hopefully come back to that. Maybe we can talk about some middle ground, and where that is. Next we have Andrew Murphy. He is one of those guys with dirt under his fingernails. He particularly likes to talk about and listen to. He is CEO of Innovative Livestock Services, a commercial cattle feeding and farming operation in Kansas. He's a 1993 graduate of Kansas State University, with a bachelor's degree in animal science, and has a master's of agriculture from Texas A&M. And has served in a variety of industries' leadership positions, both in Kansas and at the national level.*

Andrew Murphy, CEO, Innovative Livestock Services: *Thank you. And just for the record, sir, I'm the group – the second guy without a doctor around his name, who will unequivocally be the worst of the two without the doctor. So thank you for having me here today. You know, from the comments side, you prepare, you can not prepare. But I guess what I'm here to do today is tell you a little bit of a story about why I may or may not be qualified to even sit on this panel altogether.*

In 1988, a group of seven independent cattle feeders in the state of Kansas got together and decided that they were at a disadvantage in the marketing arena. And that group of seven producers said, you know, here we sit in central Kansas. Our quality of cattle is no different than the western Kansas boys. It's no different from anything along those lines. And we seem to be getting a disadvantage from the bidding process that – they were trying to figure out solutions. So, essentially formed what is now called the Beef Marketing Group Cooperative. And based out of central Kansas. Now, that group started out as a marketing co-op. They just closed the cooperative that was formed. And that group started it with an original marketing agreement with XL, or Cargill, now, as it's called. And also, in 1994, starting to have an agreement with IDP, which is now Tyson. You know, those innovative solutions to the issues that they were dealing with are what led us to a lot of different things. So, my father was an owner and operator of Greatland Feeding, which was one of the original seven, and was owner and operator of Ward Feed Yard in Kansas. And they – in 2006, we merged those two entities together and formed what's now called Innovative Livestock Services. We currently have two feed yards in Kansas, four in Nebraska. We also farm a little over 23,000 acres in central Kansas and also up in Nebraska, just as a little background for that.

Now, what qualifies me to be here on this panel today is what was formed out of this group. This group may have started out as an economic driver. It may have started out as a marketing cooperative. But it's gone much further than that. We have formed different agreements with animal health distributors, with pharmaceutical companies, trying to be as competitive as we possibly can in looking for innovations in any possible way that we can. In 1998 or 1999 – and maybe – and I'm going to be vague on that. Because I know when the group started, but I don't remember when we were approached. We were approached by Dr. Jim Marsden of Kansas State, Dr. Jim Guillard, and also Dr. Jan Swanson at Kansas State University. And they said, you know – and this would have been six years after the E. coli outbreak in 1993 with the Jack-in-the-Box issue. At that point, the – most of the interventions that were done to try to prevent E. coli were done at the packing industry level. And they came to us and said, hey, you know what? Why don't we look at doing a pre-harvest intervention program. And let's build that and see if we can't determine if there's any opportunity to build that program from the ground up. So, Heather Donnelly, who has been with us ever since 1999, was a graduate student with Dr. Guillard at the time. Started doing the research behind it, and started looking at – basically creating an asset program for the feeding industry, for our particular segment of the business. And when that was formed, she did such a nice job, and we realized how much smarter she was than any of us were. And we hired her. And she's been with us since then.

We formed a – it's a program called Progressive Feed. And that has been the place – and again, in all of our feed yards, that – since 1999. What it entails, essentially, are standard operating procedures for every segment of our business, from the time the cattle arrive until the time that the cattle are gone. That is the simplest place to put – what it has evolved into is not only a statement of operating procedures in our facilities that is well documented and third-party audited, but it also added components of environmental food safety, animal health, animal welfare – and all of those. And I'm not going to pass this around, but this is our operating manual. So each one of our feed yards has these on site. And it essentially breaks itself down into – it has a standards committee and progressive feed board. A third-party audit process. And then it has separate – four separate components in it. Well, obviously one of those being beef quality assurance, which is a national program for our national cattlemen's group. But we also have a feed meal asset program at the operating procedures obviously, and a cattle care guide. With independent subheadings under each of those. And I guess what I would represent here today is an example of some group that is doing it the right way, and always looking for opportunities to expand on that and make it better for the entire industry. We would be considered a large farming

group. We would be considered a large cattle feeder. That's what we get classified as on a daily basis. However, that doesn't necessarily make us – we're not doing things correctly in the right way. So those are the comments that I've got.

Mr. Brasher: And finally, we have Dr. Hilary Thesmar. She is Vice President of Food Safety Programs for the Food Marketing Institute, which is a leading trade group for the supermarket industry. Whose members deal directly with consumers. And prior to joining the FMI, she was senior director of scientific and regulatory affairs for the National Turkey Federation, where she led that organization's work on a variety of issues, including food safety, environmental regulations, and animal welfare. So then...

Dr. Hilary Thesmar, Vice President of Food Safety Programs, Food Marketing Institute: Thank you. And I thank you for the opportunity to be here today. And I want to introduce you a little bit to FMI, because some of you might not be as familiar with FMI as some of the other organizations represented here. We are the national trade association that conducts programs in public affairs, food safety, research, education, and industry relations on behalf of our 1,500 member companies. On both food retailers and wholesalers in the U.S. and around the world.

Our members in the U.S. operate approximately 26,000 retail food stores and 14,000 pharmacies. Their combined annual sales volume is \$680 billion, representing three quarters of all retail food stores – food store sales in the U.S. Our retail members are composed of the large multi-store chains, regional firms, and also independent supermarkets – the small mom-and-pops. Our international members include 200 companies from fifty countries. And our associate members are supplier partners that support our retail and wholesale members.

As food production increases to feed a multiplying population, the need for a stronger food safety network will only grow. And this is why FMI is concentrating in some new ways to help strengthen the food safety network in every link in the food chain. We're working closely with suppliers and our industry partners throughout the entire food chain, and we're enhancing our training programs for our retail employees so that they have the best training possible to protect the food supply for our customers at the store level.

We're also working with local, state, and federal regulators to make sure that regulations are science-based, and to make sure that officials have access to the best information possible about retail establishments. We don't want this to be done in a black hole, we want it within our stores to make sure that they can see what's going on and what the opportunities and challenges are. The safety of the products they sell are the first priority of all FMI members, who own and operate the neighborhood grocery stores and the supermarkets across the country.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to an enlightening dialogue on animal health and food safety.