Antibiotics in Animal Feed

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Introduction

The Consumer Reports National Research Center designed a survey to assess concerns and behaviors regarding antibiotics in animal feed. In March 2012, Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey administered the survey to a nationally representative sample of 1,000 U.S. residents through its CARAVAN Omnibus Survey. Respondents were selected by means of random-digit dialing and were interviewed by phone. The data were statistically weighted so that respondents in the survey were demographically and geographically representative of the U.S. population. Half of the respondents were female, and the median age was 46 years old.

Highlights

- A majority of respondents (86%) agreed that customers should be able to buy meat and poultry raised without antibiotics at their local supermarkets. Women were more likely to agree (90%) than men (82%).

- Fifty-seven percent of respondents reported that meat raised without antibiotics was available in the meat section where they usually shopped. Of those who did not have it in their local meat section, 82% said they would buy it if it were available.

- More than 60% of respondents stated that they would be willing to pay more for meat raised without antibiotics. Over a third (37%) would pay a dollar or more per pound. Just over one-third (35%) would buy meat without antibiotics only if it cost the same as regular meat. Residents of the Northeast were most likely (70%) to be willing to pay more for meat without antibiotics. Higher income respondents (those earning $50,000 per year or more) were more likely to be willing to pay more than lower income (earning less than $50,000 per year) respondents (70% versus 54%).

- The majority of respondents were extremely or very concerned about issues related to the use of antibiotics in animal feed, including the potential creation of “superbugs” due to overuse of antibiotics, unsanitary and crowded conditions for livestock, human consumption of antibiotic residue, and environmental effects due to agricultural runoff containing antibiotics.

Concern about antibiotics in animal feed

As shown in the table below, a majority of respondents expressed high levels of concern regarding issues related to antibiotic use. Overall, women tend to be more concerned about these issues than men.
Very/Extremely concerned

Widespread use of antibiotics...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widespread use of antibiotics...</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...creating new superbugs that cause illnesses that antibiotics cannot cure</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...in livestock feed allowing them to be raised in crowded and unsanitary conditions</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...leaving residues in the meat for human consumption</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…in feed leading to antibiotics polluting the environment through agricultural runoff</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, there was also a significant effect of age, where younger adults (18-24) and older adults (55 and older) tended to be more concerned than adults 25 to 54 years of age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widespread use of antibiotics...</th>
<th>18 to 24</th>
<th>25 to 34</th>
<th>35 to 44</th>
<th>45 to 54</th>
<th>55 to 64</th>
<th>65 and older</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...creating new superbugs that cause illnesses that antibiotics cannot cure</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...in livestock feed allowing them to be raised in crowded and unsanitary conditions</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...leaving residues in the meat for human consumption</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…in feed leading to antibiotics polluting the environment through agricultural runoff</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal politics and geographic region were also related to levels of concern. Respondents identifying as Republican or independent with Republican leanings were less concerned than members of other political parties (see attached tabs Excel file, “politics” worksheet). Respondents in the Western region of the United States were less concerned overall than residents of other regions (see attached file, “region” worksheet). We found no meaningful effects for employment status or education level.

Of all the issues related to antibiotics in meat, respondents were less concerned about price increases due to limiting the use of antibiotics. Only 44% of all respondents were highly concerned about this issue. Among lower income (<$50,000/year) respondents, 52% were highly concerned about price increases, but among higher income (>=$50,000/year) respondents, only a third were highly concerned. However, as seen in the table below, lower income respondents tended to be more concerned than higher income respondents regarding the other issues addressed in the survey.
Very/Extremely concerned

Widespread use of antibiotics…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widespread use of antibiotics…</th>
<th>Less than $50k/year</th>
<th>More than $50k/year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…creating new superbugs that cause illnesses that antibiotics cannot cure</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…in livestock feed allowing them to be raised in crowded and unsanitary conditions</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…leaving residues in the meat for human consumption</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…in feed leading to antibiotics polluting the environment through agricultural runoff</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Many Americans are concerned about the use of antibiotics in livestock. The majority believe that meat raised without antibiotics should be available for purchase at their local supermarkets, and many already have such meat available to them. Women and lower income respondents tend to be more concerned about issues related to the use of antibiotics, and young adults and older adults tend to have higher levels of concern than adults aged 25 to 54. Political orientation and region of residence are also related to levels of concern. Overall, the results of this survey indicate that efforts to reduce the use of antibiotics in livestock and poultry are likely to be well-received among consumers.