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## **GAO Report Says Antibiotic Resistance Linked to Antibiotic Use in Animals is “Unacceptable Threat” to Human Health**

### ***Groups Say Study Shows Need to Pass Kennedy-Snowe Bill to Phase Out Use of Important Antibiotics in Animals that are Not Sick***

**Washington** - A new report by the investigative arm of Congress, the Government Accounting Office, concludes that the Food and Drug Administration “has determined that antibiotic resistance in humans resulting from the use of antibiotics in animals is an unacceptable risk to the public health.” The study, *Antibiotic Resistance: Federal Agencies Need to Better Focus Efforts to Address Risk to Humans from Antibiotic Use in Animals (GAO-04-490)*, was requested by Senators Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Tom Harkin (D-IA). Kennedy and Snowe are sponsors of a bipartisan bill (S. 1460) to phase out the routine use of medically important antibiotics in livestock and poultry that are not sick; the bill also provides funding to help farmers make the transition. Reps. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) are sponsors of the companion bill (H.R. 2932).

“This GAO report confirms that routine overuse of antibiotics in chickens, pigs and beef cattle is a ticking time bomb, for both human health and agricultural trade,” said David Wallinga, M.D., physician-director of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy’s Antibiotic Resistance Project.

The GAO report (which is available at [www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-490](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-490)) highlights the looming trade implications for countries that do not improve their antibiotic-use practices to meet those of industry leaders (p. 43). The GAO says that U.S. meat exports were about \$7 billion in 2002 (p. 16) and observes that two of our major competitors in world meat markets – New Zealand and Denmark – have banned medically important antibiotics for growth promotion in food animals, as has the European Union (p. 43). It also notes that Japan is now reviewing such uses (p. 43). In addition, the report flags the need for collection of better data on antibiotic use in agriculture.

“Senators Kennedy, Snowe and Harkin deserve praise for getting the GAO to investigate the link between antibiotic use in animals and human antibiotic resistance,” said Margaret Mellon, J.D., Ph.D., director of the Union of Concerned Scientists’ Food and Environment Program. “Now their colleagues need to address it by passing the Kennedy-Snowe bill to preserve our shrinking supply of life-saving antibiotics.”

The GAO report concludes that “many studies have found that the use of antibiotics in animals poses significant risks for human health” (p. 6) and that animal agriculture accounts for a “large proportion” of the total quantity of antibiotics used in the U.S. (p. 1). The GAO recommends that FDA expedite its review of key antibiotics used in animal agriculture (p. 48), but also notes that FDA’s process, and any subsequent proceedings, are time-consuming (p.7).

*Keep Antibiotics Working: The Campaign to End Antibiotic Overuse* ([www.KeepAntibioticsWorking.com](http://www.KeepAntibioticsWorking.com)), is a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane and other advocacy groups with more than nine million members dedicated to eliminating a major cause of antibiotic resistance: the inappropriate use of antibiotics in food animals.

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