

Agenda Item No. 30
PARA Resolution

Madison Common Council
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Madison, WI

April 8, 2014

Dear Common Council members,

I'm writing to you in support of the resolution calling on Sen. Tammy Baldwin to press for legislative adoption of a federal law – the Preventing Antibiotic Resistance Act. I'm not profiting in any way personally from this support. My interest is out of deep concern for rural neighbors and urban consumers, both of whom I've tried to serve all my adult life – in local government, in the field of journalism, through an institute for sustainable agriculture research and education, as an advocate for economic justice and earth stewardship, and most of all, as a farmer .

We in America live in a secure sense that the wonder cure for a host of infections and diseases has always been and shall always be available to protect us in surgeries and treatment. This security is an illusion. I am 59 years old. My parents were born in the late 1920s – during the time the first antibiotic was discovered in England. Yet it wasn't until after WWII that antibiotics began being commonly prescribed outside the military to treat infections and disease. My grandparents were among the last generation in the long recorded history of humans beings who lived, often suffered and much more frequently and much younger died without benefit of antibiotics.

It's been just in my lifetime that the livestock industry began employing antibiotics to stimulate growth of poultry, pigs and cattle and to prevent epidemic losses in confined animal feeding operations. If this is going to be our food supply, if this is going to be the food system our state and federal governments continue to subsidize, foster, encourage and protect, it cannot come at the expense of the single most important line of medicines that protect human life from epidemics, and a wide range of diseases and infections.

About 20 years ago, I began to cross back over into a world 99 percent of the people in this country had left over the lifetime of our nation. With my wife and children – for my wife and children – I began to leave my vocation in journalism to enter a life of farming. I was writing about farming, interviewing farmers, assigning and editing stories about farming. What I read and heard and saw made me afraid for all children. I was concerned for the health of our young children. I wanted them to know how to grow food, how to raise and care for animals and birds. I was concerned about the public food supply and the commercial food and farming industries. I was fearful for my family's safety.

Yet I have to confess to you that I never found safety as an adult on an organic farm. The retired farmer across the road to the east of me has cancer. The retired farmer to the north of me has cancer. Two lifelong farmers to the south and southeast of me have struggled with bouts of cancer. People who live and work across most of the landmass in this country today have greater risks everywhere of contracting cancer from modern agri-business practices subsidized and encouraged by federal and state government and your tax money.

Non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock farming is just one practice among an entire array of industrial agricultural practices that deeply frightens me about food and farming systems in this country. Yet antibiotics in farming is *the* issue I believe you – the consuming, voting public - can act together to halt. I've tried for 12 years to stand up for the health of my family and rural neighbors in town, county, state meeting rooms, before agencies of government, elected leaders and courts of law. On this particular issue, the need to halt non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock production, I've never felt hopeful until now for positive change.

Concentrated animal feeding operations, raising thousands, hundreds of thousands, even in some case millions of livestock in confined, close settings began proliferating in this country 60 years ago and in this state during the past 8 years. This follows national trends that now dominate poultry, hog, cattle and even dairy production too. It is no coincidence that these trends have ushered in non-therapeutic use of antibiotics as growth stimulants and protections against disease for masses of animals and birds raised in tight quarters.

It was a number of years before I acquired the equipment and rented land and learned to raise livestock feeds organically. The first time I walked into a feed mill to purchase a bag of chick-starter for our first baby chickens, the chemical smell in the foyer of stacked bags hit me hard and sickened me. My head hurt. I felt nauseated. I knew this was not where I wanted to source feed for birds and animals. I wanted the same safety for our livestock, that we were seeking for our family and for the households beginning to purchase our vegetables in subscriptions.

Organic agriculture requires by law, that antibiotics be used only to treat – not to prevent – illness in livestock, and never to be employed to stimulate growth. It requires that animals and birds have access to fresh air, raised on pasture or open spaces where they can exercise and breathe in healthful, safe ways. Whether it is one of my children, or a lamb, chick, goat kid or pig, I want antibiotics to be there in the event of illness, and not to become ineffective by being fed daily, or breathed daily, or drunk daily, gradually building resistance of bacteria and other micro-organisms in their bodies and environment to antibiotics, rendering the medicine useless.

There are many vital reasons groups like Food and Water Watch and individuals like me look to the City of Madison to take leadership on this issue. We have one of the finest, most well-attended and supported local food movements in the nation. We have market and subscription bases that draw in and support small- and mid-size local farms within a 2-hour radius of this city. Conditions that are coming from the present misuse of antibiotics in livestock production will undermine this growing local food security in many ways.

When an epidemic or outbreak of disease for which there is no cure hits an area or a single farming operation, authorities put to death and destroy all of the livestock within a huge radius of that operation. Smaller farms with safe flocks and herds become victims of the practices of a neighbor that have caused a threat to animals and the food supply. I recently spoke with a longtime veterinary friend, who practiced years longer than the 20 years I have farmed and is now semi-retired. He said that antibiotics are becoming more and more ineffective in treatment of large animals. He said vets don't prescribe or administer 10 percent of the antibiotics being

employed in livestock production in this country. It is the large feed producers and large livestock producers that are introducing most of those millions of pounds of antibiotics into animals and thus into the water, air, wastes now building resistance to antibiotics on a huge scale. If we want our small farm families to continue natural, safe, organic and healthful practices, we can't let producers of huge scale continue to pursue economic advantage at the expense and risk of all human and animal health by practices rendering antibiotics ineffective and bacteria resistant.

Money, power, land, resources, influence are becoming concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people nationally and globally. Money, economic numbers in the short term, profits are even being placed ahead of vital considerations of health and public safety in this state. Economic burdens to our health, local economies, the environment, natural resources are being pushed off onto our bodies, our pocketbooks, our taxpayers. The entire system of production is out of control. Regulating, halting non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock production will help force the system back into the control of the people – and the ~~need for~~ vital need for this restoration has been supported by science from many quarters.

I attended 10 years ago in Iowa City, a day-long conference on the Health and Environmental Impacts of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. Doctors of microbiology, veterinary medicine, epidemiology, bacteriology, clinical health, toxicology and infectious diseases. Hydrologists, engineers, economists, life and social scientists. Scientists and doctor, after scientist and doctor rose to present research and data from around the nation and the world.

That intense day of 8 panel presentations convinced me that industrialized farming has reached proportions threatening human health and food safety on a scale rivaling nuclear proliferation. Concentrating huge numbers of animals in close spaces is providing conditions virtually impossible to control for infectious viruses that can reproduce in ways that wipe out whole species of domestic livestock and poultry and sicken or kill massive numbers of people. Dr. Robert G. Webster, a world renowned authority on influenza viruses and their role in evolution of new pandemic strains for humans and lower animals, raised these concerns in the conference. He did so in relationship to large confined animal feeding operations that create a ripe situation for 100s of billions of replications of new, potent and deadly viruses in a very short time period. One of the 3 major outbreaks of influenza in history killed more than 20 million people.

I believe instituting and enforcing restrictions on use of antibiotics in livestock production will force producers to adjust and make safer their practices; make new producers eyeing CAFO construction and expansion more thoughtful and wary about adopting or embracing those practices; revive and encourage interests in preventative health styles of farming and alternatives to bigness that are safer and less risky for everyone – consumer and farmer alike. And as the cost of treating resistant diseases and infections goes down, this will help balance out effects this regulation may have on food prices and costs of production. Personally, I put health – not money first – in my life and work as a farmer, as a consumer, as a parent, as a citizen.

With these changes, antibiotics will be there for livestock in event of illness; they will become more effective again if their use is limited to emergencies and actual health problems and not

administered routinely, daily in feeds and unsafe conditions. It will be up to producers to take actions, change how they raise livestock to ensure against illness happen. They will have to absorb the costs they now put off on the environment and all health by changing their practices.

Growth hormones and antibiotics used to push livestock productivity are flushing through the systems of poultry and livestock from massive slurries of millions of gallons of liquid manure, constantly applied to broad land base and into water supplies, soils, clouds of dust, our entire environments with alarming frequency and eventually disastrous consequences. *(One national reconnaissance study discussed at that conference 10 years ago found one or more antibiotics in 48 percent of streams sampled and 14 of 22 antibiotics detected at least once. Half of these antibiotics are almost identical to the same medicines used to treat human beings, and with every use they are building resistance to their use and rendering the single-most important medical protection against infection and disease, useless).*

Livestock typically pass 25 to 75 percent of antibiotics (used in feeds to make them get bigger, faster, or to keep them alive in crowded and sometimes unsanitary conditions) from their bodies with their wastes. The antibiotics have turned up in samplings of soil, dust particles in the air, water in wells, liquid slurries of manure lagoons and tanks, around and especially downstream of CAFOs. Public health officials have found these antibiotics in the vital organs of livestock sold for meat at slaughter. Implications for our food supply of ingesting a steady diet of antibiotics explains growing resistance among our human population to antibiotics. This is a national crisis with global implications for health.

When I'm in a garden, a field, a pasture – when I feel the miracles of soil life, seeds, plants, birds and animals in my hands and all around me – I feel the same love I hold in my heart for each of my children. A world in which antibiotics are reserved for emergencies, only as a last resort to bolster natural abilities within human and animal organisms to resist disease and illness – is a world in which the vital resources of the farm are protected and safe for everyone. I ask you to resolve support of this world and urge Sen. Tammy Baldwin to do the same.

With respect and confidence, I am yours truly,



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