

# *The Kansas City Food Circle*

## UPDATE

Winter, 2001

### Pressure builds to ban antibiotics in animal feed

In a recent lead editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Sherwood Gorbach of the Tufts University Medical School said it was time to stop using antibiotics in animal feed. This is a common practice in animal factories to promote growth and enhance feed efficiency.

Dr. Gorbach's article was prompted by new evidence that this practice is creating bacteria with resistance to antibiotics important to human health. One study found that 20 percent of ground meat found in supermarkets was contaminated with salmonella. The figures for poultry, turkey, pork and beef were 35%, 24%, 16% and 6% respectively. Of these positive samples 84% of the bacteria were resistant to one antibiotic and 53% displayed resistance to at least 3 antibiotics. Of particular concern was the isolation of a type of salmonella that can be life threatening and resistant to almost all antibiotics.

In a second study, resistant strains of another infectious bacterium (*E. faecium*) were found in 58% of chickens from supermarkets. These were found in 21 of 26 supermarket chains and 59% of brands. This bacterium is resistant to a new antibiotic that was just approved by the FDA to treat pathogens resistant to vancomycin. The authors attributed this result to the widespread use of a related antibiotic in chicken feed. A third study found that antibiotic resistant bacteria were able to colonize the intestinal tracts of healthy volunteers for up to 14 days.

Bans on the sub-therapeutic use of antibiotics in animal feed are already in place in Europe. This past June the American Medical Association went on record opposing the use of antibiotics in healthy animals. Although human illness has been traced to antibiotic resistant bacteria found in food, it's still unclear how big the problem is beyond the millions who already suffer from food borne illness each year. Ag interests estimate that the use of antibiotics decreases the cost of meat and poultry by about 5%. However Dr. Gorbach notes that the increasing resistance of bacteria to drugs can increase the frequency and severity of infections, limit treatment options, and raise health care costs. We note that some of the companies that sell veterinarian medicines also sell medicines to us, and the newest "miracle drugs" are enormously expensive.

How to buy organic and local in the winter

The general membership meeting of the Kansas City Food Circle will be held at 1:30pm Sunday, Dec. 2 at the Kansas City South Library, 201 E 75<sup>th</sup> St., in KCMO. The main topic will be how to buy organic foods during the winter. This will include presentations on how to buy foods

through the Franklin Center and the Ozark Warehouse or through buying clubs and Blooming Prairie Warehouse. Also we will have a list of Food Circle Farmers who have products to sell this winter including milk, eggs, fresh greens and free range meats. We will also review our successes and challenges from the past year and talk about 2002. We usually have several of our producers in attendance and some munchies, too! Non-members are welcome, too.

#### **New Farm Bill subsidizes factory farms**

The U. S. House of Representatives has passed a farm bill that removes the size cap in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that pays farmers to install pollution control measures. Heretofore payments were capped at operations with 1000 cows or 2500 hogs. A typical payment was \$5000. Now payments up to \$200,000 can be made to operations of any size including the massive hog factories springing up in the Great Plains and Midwest. There are numerous other problems with the House Farm Bill.

Sustainable Ag forces are making a stand in the U. S. Senate. Please call your Senator and tell him you don't want to subsidize factory farms, and more money should be spent on legitimate conservation programs and not on subsidies for large grain farms. You can access the latest information at the following web sites: National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture at [www.sustainableagriculture.net](http://www.sustainableagriculture.net), the Environmental Working Group at [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org) and Environmental Defense at [www.edf.org](http://www.edf.org)

#### **Free range meats go mainstream**

Major restaurant chains are now selling dishes with free range meat. T.G.1. Friday has decided to use only natural beef in its burgers, and Chipotle Mexican Grill is using free range, natural pork in its burritos. David Wallinga, a physician with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy notes, "Food critics and chefs, and now T.G.I.F are saying that meats raised more naturally, without antibiotics, taste good."

Chipotles's pork is supplied by Niman Ranch who now contracts with 150 small farmers in the Midwest who raise their pigs according to Animal Welfare Institute standards. Niman Ranch pays its farmers a premium over the market price even when times are bad. Chipotle founder, Steve Eills, said he charges an extra dollar for his free range burritos but, nonetheless, is selling 2 1/2 times as many.

### **Animal welfare activists expose cruelty in factory farms**

In two recent successes, gutsy animal welfare staffers penetrated the secret workings of the industrial meat industry to expose heinous cruelty. In April the Humane Farming Association broke through the usual reticence of big media to talk about this disturbing topic. In a wide ranging expose, the *Washington Post* described extensive violations of the 1978 Humane Slaughter Act in slaughterhouses across the United States.

Much credit goes to Gail Eisnitz who spoke to us at the Food Circle's 1999 food system conference, who wrote the book, *Slaughterhouse*, and conducted an extensive investigation of the IBP beef slaughterhouse in Pasco, Washington. This expose apparently caught the attention of a powerful U. S. senator who inserted \$1 million into the USDA budget to increase enforcement. The USDA announced they would hire some veterinarians to work on it. It remains to be seen whether this will solve the problem, but it's a good start.

In another case an undercover agent for PET A (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) videotaped workers in an Oklahoma hog factory savagely beating young pigs to death. The operator, giant Seaboard Farms, Inc., claimed it was an isolated incident and fired the manager of the facility. Look for a future article on how the peculiar design and operation of these massive hog factories sets the stage for animal cruelty.

### **Massive Utah Fire Kills 16,000 Pigs**

On July 29, a fire destroyed a 5000-sow breeding facility in Utah owned by mega producer Smithfield Foods of Virginia. Some 5,000 sows and gilts, plus 11,000 young pigs, died from the fire or were destroyed later due to injuries. According to *Feedstuffs Magazine*, smoke was detected at about 5:30 pm by a company security guard patrolling several miles away. Firefighters arrived too late to control the blaze. Employees had departed prior to the alarm.

A farmer friend of the Food Circle pointed out that no humans were on site to stop the fire before it got out of control. He noted that he and his wife used to stay up late at night helping sows deliver and tending to the health of the herd. Nothing we've seen yet so acutely contrasts the corruption of our industrial agricultural system.

Transgenic crop becomes a weed

In a Canadian Broadcast Corporation TV story that conjures up nightmares, agricultural officials in Manitoba described emerging side effects of growing genetically engineered canola. This new canola has been found in fields where it was never planted and is not wanted. A University of Manitoba expert noted that GM canola has spread much more rapidly than they expected and is impossible to control. Another official suggested that farmers use chemicals to kill it. Of course GM

canola was created to reduce chemical use. But scientists say that the canola was sprayed with three different chemicals and still wouldn't die. Monsanto said it's not a big deal. Farmers should just give them a call, and they'd send somebody out to pull the plants out by hand.

Source: *Cropchoice Farm News*.

### **A better banana**

The Rainforest Alliance has certified 100% of Chiquita's farms in Latin America as environmentally friendly and socially responsible. Under the Alliance's Better Banana project, farmers follow strict guidelines to conserve soil and water and minimize the use of pesticides and other agrichemicals. These bananas are not labeled as such, but they make up more than 900/0 of Chiquita's sales in Europe and about two thirds in the U.S. Source: *Audubon Magazine*.

### **Food Circle Gives You a Little and a Lot**

Many of you receiving this newsletter are Food Circle Members and many of you have received information from the Food Circle, but are not yet members. Non-members frequently ask, What do I get for my Food Circle membership? The answer is a little and a lot.

The Food Circle doesn't have a glossy magazine, monthly meetings, or monthly mailings. We don't ask you to give extra contributions. That's a little.

We are an organization whose sole purpose is to promote local, sustainable agriculture. Farming is hard work. Most farmers are too busy farming to spend large amounts of time to marketing. The Food Circle forms a connection between farmers and consumers. We send out newsletters and free information to the public in order to educate consumers on some of the many issues related to farming and food safety.

We hold general membership meetings twice a year so consumers can meet farmers face-to-face. Those meetings provide an educational forum for food issues. If you attend a meeting, you can sometimes buy goods directly from attending farmers and sample some really good food. We publish a yearly directory of farmers and what they produce, so if you're looking for farm-fresh veggies with no pesticides or a local source of milk or where you can buy a fresh turkey that has been raised without antibiotics and hormones in the great outdoors, you have a resource.

We hold an annual Farmers Expo where you can sign up for a CSA (weekly veggie bundle), buy seedlings, free range meats, canned goods, and flour or find a place you can buy food in bulk. For the last two years, we've held a picnic/ potluck where we've provided local fresh corn and everyone brings a potluck dish. A potluck where farmers and consumers are showing off their best is a joy to behold. That's a lot.