

STEERING COMMITTEE

Center for Science
in the Public Interest

Environmental Defense
Fund

Food Animal
Concerns Trust

Humane Society
of the United States

Institute for Agriculture
and Trade Policy

Lymphoma Foundation
of America

National Catholic
Rural Life Conference

Natural Resources
Defense Council

Physicians for Social
Responsibility

Safe Tables Our Priority
(S.T.O.P.)

Sierra Club

Union of Concerned
Scientists

Waterkeeper Alliance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 3, 2011

Contact: Zach Goldberg, 202-478-6171
zgoldberg@mrss.com

**SALMONELLA HEIDELBERG OUTBREAK PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON
ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

FDA data show that 1 in 10 packages of ground turkey has resistant Salmonella

*Resistant strain of Salmonella Heidelberg spread through ground turkey
has killed one, caused 77 illnesses*

Washington, D.C. – While officials have yet to determine the source of the ground turkey that is contaminated with antibiotic-resistant *Salmonella*, the outbreak of *Salmonella* Heidelberg reflects a growing public health crisis in which the overuse in animal agriculture of antibiotics critical to human medicine has weakened their effectiveness. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), 1 in 10 packages of ground turkey has resistant *Salmonella*. Additionally, health officials in Canada showed that *Salmonella* Heidelberg is linked to antibiotic use in poultry hatcheries.

Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) – a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane, and other advocacy groups with more than eleven million supporters – today addressed the growing outbreak of antibiotic resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg infections spread through ground turkey, and urged Administration and Congressional leaders to protect the public health and reduce the growing threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

“The ongoing outbreak of antibiotic resistant *Salmonella* spread through ground turkey is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to resistant food-borne infections in the United States,” said Steven Roach, Public Health Program Director at Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT), and a member of Keep Antibiotics Working. “There are over one million cases of *Salmonella* in the U.S. every year, and 1 in 5 of these is resistant to antibiotics. As we have seen, when *Salmonella* is resistant, it is harder and more expensive to treat - leading to increased hospitalizations and even increased fatalities of illnesses.”

“With each new outbreak of resistant superbug infections coming from food, it’s fair to ask when the FDA and Congress will act to protect our food supply and our public health,” Roach added.

KAW is urging Congress and the Administration to curtail the rampant overuse of antibiotics in agriculture and to protect Americans from increasingly dangerous bacteria that contaminate our food supply.

According to data released by the FDA in December 2010, 80 percent of antibiotic drugs in the United States were sold for use in food animals – most of them not to treat animal illness, but to promote slightly faster growth and to compensate for crowded, stressful, and unhygienic conditions at industrial-scale livestock and poultry facilities. Such use of antibiotics is referred to as “non-therapeutic” use, meaning they are not used for the treatment of illness. Many of the antibiotics fed to animals are the same as those we depend on for human medicine. They are given in low doses virtually every day of the animal’s life – a recipe for developing “super bugs” – without so much as a veterinarian’s prescription.

Currently, the FDA process for removing animal drugs from the market when they contribute to human antibiotic resistance is far too slow to keep pace with the rapid rate at which resistance is emerging. KAW supports the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA), bipartisan legislation that would address this inaction and reduce antibiotic resistance by phasing out the use of medically important antibiotics in food animals that are not sick.

Specifically, the bill would prohibit giving antibiotics to food animals for reasons other than disease treatment if the same or related drugs are also used in human medicine. If a drug company can show that their product is not creating a human health problem due to resistance, it will be exempt from the prohibition.

“This tragic *Salmonella* outbreak should be a bright warning sign that we face an ever growing public health crisis. For more than 30 years, FDA and Congress have failed to address the overuse of antibiotics on farms. We shouldn’t have to wait any longer,” said Richard Wood, Executive Director of FACT and Chair of KAW’s Executive Committee.

###