

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

STOP Foodborne
Illness

Sierra Club

Union of Concerned
Scientists

Waterkeeper Alliance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 11, 2011

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

NEW EVIDENCE: CHANGING TO ORGANIC FARMING REDUCES ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

New Science Connects the Farm to the Hospital

Washington, D.C. – One week after the outbreak of *Salmonella* spread through ground turkey raised the specter of drug resistant food-borne infections, a new scientific study released this week shows that changing farm practice can help stem the spread in poultry meat of another bug that is a major cause of expensive resistant infections in hospitals.

The study, by researchers from the University of Maryland and the FDA, compared poultry farms where antibiotics were used with organic poultry farms that had recently switched to antibiotic-free production. The new organic farms had much lower amounts of resistant bacteria than the conventional farms.

"What this study tells us is that conventional, rather than organic farms, seem to be the generators of resistance to gentamicin and penicillin," said David Wallinga, MD, a physician at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and a steering committee member of the Keep Antibiotics Working coalition. "That's important because these are the 'go to' medicines that doctors rely on for treating patients with really serious infections of the heart, blood and urinary tract that are caused by enterococcal bacteria. These are exactly the kind of infections that can kill people in hospitals."

Per the study, for *Enterococcus faecalis*, which has been shown to spread from food animals to humans, 42 percent of the bacteria from conventional farms was multi-drug resistant but only 10 percent of the bacteria from organic farms was. Gentamicin and penicillin resistant *enterococci* were only found on conventional farms.

The study found significantly lower resistance among *enterococci* bacteria to six different human drugs. *Enterococci* are a type of bacteria found in the human gut that can cause illness when they infect other parts of the body. Resistant *enterococci* are a particular problem in hospitals, where they kill patients. Food animals and food are recognized as a potential source of resistant *enterococci* in humans.

“As more and more people die from increasingly costly drug-resistant infections, it’s clear that we need to protect antibiotics. Moving from conventional farming to organic farming is one way to fight this crisis,” Wallinga added.

The study can be found at

<http://ehp03.niehs.nih.gov/article/fetchArticle.action?articleURI=info%3Adoi%2F10.1289%2Fehp.1003350>.

Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) is a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane, and other advocacy groups, with more than 11 million supporters, dedicated to reducing the inappropriate use of antibiotics in livestock.