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Keep Antibiotics Working Coalition Applauds Tyson for Producing Fresh Chickens Without Antibiotics

Washington, DC – Medical experts and health advocates hailed today's announcement by Tyson Foods that in response to consumer demand its fresh chickens would be raised without antibiotics as another step in preserving the effectiveness of critical life-saving medicines (see Tyson news release: www.tyson.com/Corporate/PressRoom/ViewArticle.aspx?id=2744).

"It's big news when the largest chicken producer in the country uses an antibiotic-free label to gain a competitive advantage," said David Wallinga, M.D., director of the Food and Health Program at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and a member of the Keep Antibiotics Working coalition (KAW). "What's good for public health is also good business. Tyson should be applauded for taking this great step forward."

Medical and public health experts have long decried the use of antibiotics in animal feed – both to promote growth and to compensate for unsanitary conditions on industrial-scale farms – because it spurs the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that spread to humans via our food, air and water. The Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that 70% of all antibiotics used in the U.S., nearly 25 million pounds annually, are used as feed additives for chicken, hogs, and beef cattle.

Routine antibiotic use in animal feed continues, despite a strong health rationale for stopping it and recent science showing no profit from the practice. A Johns Hopkins University study released in January showed that the use of growth-promoting antibiotics in chicken feed slightly accelerated chicken growth, but that the benefit was offset by the cost of purchasing antibiotics, with the total cost rising by about one penny per chicken (see http://www.keepantibioticsworking.com/new/resources_library.cfm?refID=96802).

Proposed federal legislation, The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act, (H.R. 962/S. 549), sponsored by Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chair Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) and House Rules Committee Chair Louise Slaughter (D-NY), would phase out the use of antibiotics that are important in human medicine as animal feed additives within two years. The American Medical Association, the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and the American Academy of Pediatrics are among the more than 350 health, agriculture and other groups nationwide that have endorsed this bill.

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