



## Q & A | Antibiotics in Poultry Production

### **1) *Are antibiotics and hormones the same thing?***

No. And perhaps just as important, added hormones or steroids are never used in turkey production in the U.S. - there are NO hormones or steroids approved for such a use. (And this goes for chickens, as well.) Some poultry brands indicate on their packaging that its products are "hormone free" but in reality, this is just marketing. ALL poultry in the U.S. is free of added hormones and have been since the 1950s.

### **2) *What do turkey farmers use antibiotics for?***

Approved antibiotics in poultry production can be used to 1) individually treat sick birds, 2) control disease within an entire flock that has sick birds in it; and 3) to prevent disease completely.

Depending on the situation, a farmer may choose to treat only the birds that are sick with antibiotics, but it is also true that a farmer may want to administer antibiotics to an entire flock after some sick birds in the flock are diagnosed. As is the case with humans and germs, sick birds can spread illness to healthy birds pretty quickly so sometimes the best way to ensure a flock stays as healthy as possible is to treat all the birds with medication.

### **3) *What does it mean when we hear "growth promoting antibiotics"?***

When antibiotics are administered to birds, the medication can help growth in healthy birds because it keeps them from getting sick. Naturally, healthy birds eat and drink better than sick birds, which in turn leads to better growth.

Some poultry companies have announced they are ending the use of antibiotics for the overall prevention of disease; however, they will continue to use antibiotics as needed to treat sick birds and control disease within an entire flock because it's the right thing to do for the birds. Turkey farmers feel it is the humane thing to do to treat sick birds with antibiotics, if that is the treatment prescribed by a veterinarian. We don't know any farmer who wants to see his or her birds suffer from illness.

### **4) *Does anyone oversee the use of antibiotics in turkey production?***

Farmers work with poultry veterinarians to diagnose disease and administer antibiotics, if needed. Also, all antibiotic use in poultry follows strict dosing guidelines from the FDA.

### **5) *What about "antibiotic free" poultry?***

All poultry is antibiotic free because there are strict withdrawal times for every medication - meaning the farmer MUST wait a certain amount of time after administering antibiotics to send the bird to market.

Birds are randomly tested for antibiotic residues before the flock goes to market to make sure no birds have any antibiotic residue. If an unsafe residue is found, the entire flock is held back until samples prove the meat is safe.

However, products marked by the "antibiotic-free" label at the supermarket have not been given antibiotics at all for any reason during the course of their life.

***6) We hear a lot about antibiotic resistance these days; should we be worried?***

It's easy to blame antibiotic use in food animals for the antibiotic resistance stories we're hearing about in the news. However, that's a pretty simplistic answer to a complicated issue. There are many factors to consider, including the fact that there are no peer-reviewed research that connects antibiotic resistance in humans to antibiotic use in food animals; the rate of human antibiotic use; and knowing which animal antibiotics are also used to treat human medical conditions - and the answer to that, is not many.

Because antibiotic resistance is certainly concerning and should be scientifically studied, there are several layers of protection that are in place to ensure that animal antibiotics do not affect public health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the FDA, and the Department of Agriculture (USDA), along with the veterinary community, animal health companies and farmers, all work together to protect human health.

You can read more details here from the Animal Health Institute. (link to: <http://www.ahi.org/issues-advocacy/animal-antibiotics/>)

The National Chicken Council also has an excellent Q & A on antibiotic use in poultry production here. (link to: <http://www.nationalchickencouncil.org/questions-answers-antibiotics-chicken-production/>)