

**Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter**  
**Remarks for the Record of the Hearing:**  
**21st Century Cures: Examining Ways to Combat Antibiotic**  
**Resistance and Foster New Drug Development**  
**September 19, 2014**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to submit remarks for the record this morning. I appreciate the attention being paid to the crisis of antibiotic resistance and the immediate need to address it. While I appreciate that the focus of today's hearing is on the development of new antibiotics, I cannot let the opportunity pass to discuss the overuse of antibiotics in agriculture and the connection to the development of superbugs resistant even to some of our last line of defense antibiotics.

Almost 70 years ago, Alexander Fleming first warned about the possibility of a post-antibiotic era, warning that – quote – “the ignorant man may easily underdose himself and by exposing his microbes to non-lethal quantities of the drug make them resistant.”

I'm not sure Dr. Fleming could have envisioned that the biggest threat to antibiotics in the future would come from factory farms – where 80 percent of the antibiotics in this country are used in animals that eventually end up on our dinner plate. His warning rings true today: the daily distribution of antibiotics in feed and water at sub-therapeutic levels is creating resistant superbugs, and destroying the

effectiveness of these miracle drugs.

According to a recent report from the World Health Organization, “Antibiotic resistance is now a bigger crisis than the AIDS epidemic,” and if we do not curb our antibiotic overuse, “a post-antibiotic era—in which common infections and minor injuries can kill—far from being an apocalyptic fantasy, is instead a very real possibility for the twenty-first century.” This would redefine modern medicine. Routine infections like strep throat could be fatal. A skinned knee that became infected could become fatal. Life-saving surgeries like open-heart surgery or organ transplants that require antibiotics to stave off infection would become too dangerous for doctors to consider. All of these medical advances would be thrown away because we are wasting these critical antibiotics on the farm.

There are those who say there is not a connection between overuse of antibiotics on the farm and resistant diseases in humans. I struggle to understand their decision-making process when the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System (NARMS) reports that antibiotic resistant bacteria exist in 81% of ground turkey, 69% of pork chops, 55% of ground beef, and 39% of chicken breasts, wings and thighs found in grocery stores. More than 27% of bacterial isolates found on retail chicken are resistant to more than five classes of antibiotics.

Just this week, the top scientific minds in this country who make up the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology released their report on antimicrobial resistance and confirmed what I and over 450 of the leading medial, scientific and consumer groups in the country who support my legislation have been shouting from the rooftops for years. Allow me quote that report:

**“Substantial evidence demonstrates that use of antibiotics in animal agriculture promotes the development of antibiotic-resistant microbes in animals and that retail meat can be a source of microbes, including antibiotic-resistant microbes. Moreover, antibiotic resistance can spread between microbes (through the transfer of DNA elements, such as plasmids, between species) and antibiotic-resistant microbes can spread from animals to people who come into contact or close proximity with them. For example, poultry workers in Maryland and Virginia have been reported to be much more likely to be colonized by gentamicin-resistant E. coli and are at a higher risk of infection by multi-drug resistant E. coli than residents of the community surrounding the poultry operation. A survey of over 900 adults in Wisconsin and Minnesota found that drug-resistant E. coli bacteria isolates present in humans were similar to those in poultry meat, whereas drug-susceptible E. coli bacteria isolates were not. A study of veterans in rural Iowa reported that the frequency of resistant Staphylococcus aureus was 88% higher among veterans living within one mile of a high-density swine-feeding operation.”**

Despite the substantial evidence and despite the nightmare scenario of a post-antibiotic era, both our federal regulatory agencies and the Congress are still refusing to acknowledge the devastating role that antibiotic use in agriculture is having on the future of medicine in the United States. I am imploring you today, as you consider the future of antibiotic development in this country, that you also consider that the routine overuse of future antibiotics would result in the same conditions we face today. We must preserve those antibiotics critical to human health for use in treating disease – not for growth promotion or disease prevention. Antibiotics are for treatment of illness – period.

My legislation – the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act – would save eight critical classes of antibiotics for human use while still allowing the treatment of sick animals. I’ve carried this bill for seven years now, and I’m not going to rest until it becomes law. There are too many lives at stake to give up. We can and must preserve antibiotics – the future of modern medicine depends upon it.

Thank you.