McDonald’s raises the bar for responsible antibiotic use in beef

The Big Mac is taking a big bite out of the overuse of antibiotics.

In December, McDonald’s released a new policy to restrict medically important antibiotics in its beef supply chain. It will monitor antibiotic use in its top 10 global beef sourcing markets and set reduction targets by the end of 2020.

Whether you eat at McDonald’s or not, this is an important step forward for public health. We rely on antibiotics to treat life-threatening infections and to ensure that surgery, chemotherapy and other medical procedures are safe. But the overuse of antibiotics is leading to the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, called “superbugs,” that are now shaking the foundations of modern medicine.

“The Golden Arches just raised the bar for responsible antibiotic use in meat production,” said Matt Wellington, director of our national Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign. “McDonald’s new commitment is a promising step forward that will help preserve antibiotics for the future, and that’s something we should all be happy about.”

Misuse of antibiotics is one of the biggest threats to global health today

While overuse in medical settings is a factor in the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, industrialized livestock operations—like the ones that supply McDonald’s beef—play an outsized role in this looming public health threat.

A staggering 70 percent of medically important antibiotics are sold for use in livestock and poultry operations here in the United States. These drugs are routinely given to animals to help them survive crowded, stressful and unsanitary conditions, regardless of whether the animals are actually sick.

The stakes couldn’t be higher. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conservatively estimates that at least 2 million Americans are sickened and 23,000 die each year as a direct result of antibiotic-resistant infections. However, recent estimates suggest more than 150,000 Americans died of antibiotic-resistant infections in 2010.

The World Health Organization has called antibiotic resistance “one of the biggest threats to global health, food security and development today.”

Commitments from McDonald’s, KFC, Subway and more

We shouldn’t allow the meat industry to misuse our life-saving medicines just to make cows a little fatter and burgers a little cheaper.

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Millions of Washingtonians were affected by online data breaches during the 2017-2018 fiscal year.

Our mission
When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, WashPIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. WashPIRG’s mission is to deliver persistent, results-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

News Briefs

PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG

Data breaches threatened digital privacy of 3.4 million Washingtonians last year

Millions of Washingtonians were affected by a total of 51 data breaches from July 2017 to July 2018, but many have no idea.

On Oct. 30, the Washington state attorney general released its 2018 Data Breach Report, which found that 3.4 million Washingtonians were left vulnerable by data breaches. The number of those affected by data breaches increased 26 percent from the previous year and more than 700 percent from two years ago. But Washington’s current data breach notification law is not strong enough, and too many are left in the dark when their data is compromised.

“Not notifying someone when you know their passwords, tax ID number, passport number or DNA profile have been compromised is unacceptable,” said Elise Orlick, state director of WashPIRG. “Washington needs to step up and better protect consumers.”

PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG

Asbestos, lead found in some common school supplies

Parents should be able to send their kids off to school without worrying whether their school supplies will make them sick—but new testing suggests otherwise.

After testing dozens of markers, crayons, binders and more, WashPIRG Foundation discovered that some common school supplies contained asbestos, lead or other dangerous substances. Released on Aug. 7, 2018, our “Safer School Supplies Shopping Guide” warned consumers about the toxic products we found, and offered suggestions for safer alternatives.

“Parents and teachers can use our shopping guide to help them purchase safer school supplies,” said our national Consumer Watchdog team’s Kara Cook-Schultz, who co-authored the report.

Our researchers found asbestos-tainted crayons from Playskool and a 3-ring binder from Jot containing high levels of phthalates. Both products were purchased from Dollar Tree. We’re urging manufacturers and retailers to recall toxic products and remove them from store shelves.

21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

Electric buses are the future. Here’s how to pay for them

Dirty, unhealthy and expensive, diesel buses embody transportation’s past. Electric buses are the future.

Not only are electric buses cleaner than their diesel-powered predecessors, according to a report released Oct. 30, 2018, by U.S. PIRG Education Fund, transit agencies and school districts also have affordable options to adopt them. These include municipal bonds in addition to the lifetime fuel and maintenance savings of electric school buses, which the report estimates to be around $170,000 per bus.

“Each day, millions of Americans, and millions of our children, get on diesel-powered buses that emit toxic fumes that make them sick,” said Matt Casale, director of our national network’s transportation campaign. “We have a better option: the zero-tailpipe emission, all-electric bus. We all deserve cleaner air.”

The report recommends that transit agencies and school districts commit to transitioning their fleets from diesel to all-electric by 2030.

Read more updates on our work at http://washpirg.org
McDonald’s raises the bar for responsible antibiotic use in beef

For years, WashPIRG and our national network have called on major restaurants, including McDonald’s, to take action. And our advocacy helped persuade McDonald’s to stop serving chicken raised on our life-saving medicines in 2015—a commitment that helped push chicken supplier Tyson Foods to start raising its chickens without routine antibiotics.

KFC, Subway and other restaurants and suppliers quickly followed suit, and we estimate that soon nearly half of all chicken in this country will be raised without the routine use of medically important antibiotics.

McDonald’s newest commitment to reduce the routine use of medically important antibiotics in its beef supply is the culmination of over a year’s work by WashPIRG and our coalition partners. More than 80 international stakeholders, including health, environmental and consumer groups, called on McDonald’s to act. We organized top medical professionals across the country to speak out about the health risks, and our national network delivered more than 150,000 petition signatures to McDonald’s headquarters during its annual shareholder meeting.

With McDonald’s taking an important step in the right direction, WashPIRG will continue to work with the burger chain that’s served billions to set strong reduction targets by the end of 2020.

“Consumers called on McDonald’s to hold the antibiotics,” said Matt. “Its response shows progress, and we look forward to seeing the company continue to use its size for good when it comes to preserving life-saving antibiotics.”

McDonald’s received an “F” in the report, and later responded that the company would release a global antibiotics policy for its beef by the end of the year.

Today, we’re pleased that McDonald’s followed through on its pledge to take the next step in restricting antibiotics use. As the largest purchaser of beef in the U.S., McDonald’s action could spark an industry-wide change as the beef industry will now have to meet McDonald’s—and consumers’—demands to reduce the routine use of antibiotics in beef.

By Matt Wellington, director
Campaign to Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics
Ban Roundup

Jury finds Monsanto’s Roundup responsible for man’s terminal cancer

Monsanto has been held accountable for hiding the health risks of Roundup in a California courtroom.

In August 2018, a jury awarded millions in damages to Dewayne Johnson, a former school groundskeeper who claimed his terminal non-Hodgkin lymphoma was caused by years of using the herbicide Roundup. Twenty-six million pounds of Roundup are sprayed on school grounds, parks and gardens every year, and Johnson’s case was the first to go to trial of more than 800 patients suing Monsanto.

“I would never have sprayed that product on school grounds or around people if I knew it would cause harm,” Johnson testified. His lawyer said, “We were finally able to show the jury the secret, inter-

nal Monsanto documents proving that Monsanto has known for decades that ... Roundup could cause cancer.”

As the evidence against Roundup piles up, WashPIRG is working to protect our public health by banning the herbicide in Washington.