

Are vets using too many antibiotics on farms?

By Dan Charles, NPR

In a barn outside Manhattan, Kansas, researchers from Kansas State University are trying to solve the riddle of bovine respiratory disease. They're sticking plastic rods down the noses of 6-month-old calves, collecting samples of bacteria.

"This bacteria, *Mannheimia haemolytica*, lives in most cattle," explains Mike Apley, one of the research leaders. Sometimes, for reasons that aren't well understood, those bacteria make cattle sick. When that happens, or when it just seems likely to happen, cattlemen deploy antibiotics.

Apley hopes to find out, among other things, whether those antibiotics actually work as advertised. If they don't, he says, it's an easy decision to not use them. Farmers save money and meat industry critics, who want farmers to use fewer antibiotics, are happy, too. "It's a win-win for everyone."

These pigs, newly weaned from their mothers, are at their most vulnerable stage of life. They're getting antibiotics in their water to ward off bacterial infection.

Piglets in a pen on a hog farm in Frankenstein, Mo.

Unfortunately, when it comes to antibiotics on the farm, it's not always a win-win. And when there's a fight, veterinarians are right in the middle of it, pushed back and forth by conflicting loyalties.

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