

Opinion: FDA's blatant failure on food

By Ruth Reichl, New York Times

Every year, antibiotic-resistant infections kill at least 23,000 Americans and make another two million sick, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's why a recent ruling by the United States Second Circuit Court of Appeals is so appalling.

It allows the federal Food and Drug Administration to leave an antibiotic used in animal feed on the market even if the agency openly states that the drug's use is not safe and increases the risk of antibiotic resistance in people. This means that the dangerous misuse of antibiotics in industrial livestock and poultry can continue unabated.

For years industrial meat and poultry producers have fed healthy animals antibiotics to fatten them up fast. The antibiotics also prevent disease in what are often overcrowded, unsanitary conditions. This practice breeds antibiotic-resistant bacteria that threaten us all.

The F.D.A. has issued a toothless voluntary guidance document for the industry, which requires no action to reduce antibiotic use and will therefore do little to nothing to stop the spread of antibiotic-resistant superbugs.

Why should we be concerned? Because the superbugs bred on industrial farms can easily travel to us in our food – as in the recent antibiotic-resistant salmonella outbreak linked to Foster Farms chicken that has sickened over 600 people. The superbugs also get into our water and our soil. Some of the antibiotic-resistant bacteria can cause life-threatening infections.

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