

US Pushing Drugged, Vaccinated, Chlorinated Chickens on the World

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After over half a billion eggs were recalled from two factory hen layer operations in Iowa,[1] New York lawmakers proposed mandating vaccines against salmonella. [2] Mainstream media then blasted this message across the world. As the world's largest producer of poultry [3] and second largest exporter [4], the US continues to hammer Russia about its embargo of chlorinated chickens.[5] Home to the biggest pharmaceutical and chemical companies in the world, the US is fond of throwing drugs and chemicals at a problem instead of addressing the filth of factory farms.

Russia, the top importer of US poultry, produces only half of its chicken consumption. [6] It banned chlorinated chickens on January 1, but recently reopened its doors to 70 US companies in line with a chlorine-free agreement between Presidents Obama and Medvedev in late June. [7] Obama balked, however, when Russia asked to inspect the processing plants. [8]

On August 31, thirty US Senators sent a letter to Russia's ambassador asking for a full lift of the ban, but failed to mention the chlorine issue. Instead, profits were stressed. [9]

Until 2008, the European Union also banned chlorinated poultry. Greenpeace condemned the procedural maneuver that removed public debate on the issue. [10]

But the global market for US poultry more than made up for Russia's hesitancy. June was a phenomenal month for US exports – marking a 20-month high. In its latest export report, the US Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) wrote: [11]

“Increases in shipments to Mexico (26%), the Baltic States (60%), Newly Independent States (including Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) (155%), Philippines (310%), Korea and Hong Kong (174%), and Japan (181%) all rose beyond last June's shipment volumes.

In a single month, the Ukraine increased imports from one million pounds of poultry to almost 30 million.

Chlorinated chicken poses a health risk

Despite global acceptance of US chicken decontamination procedures, chlorine is a known carcinogen. It reacts with and is retained by muscle tissue, but especially fats and the liver of chickens. [12] It is a boon for the poultry industry, though. Chlorine treated chicken carcasses weigh more than those treated with unchlorinated water. [13]

As to carcass sanitation, “the most common (and recommended) disinfecting method is steamed/hot water (>180 °F) instead of applying antimicrobial substances,” explains Marc Thibault of Green Age. [14]

The USDA reports that there are currently 280 million egg-laying hens in the US, producing about 77 billion eggs a year. [15] Hens usually produce eggs until they are 18-26 months old. [16] Once spent, some are rendered into “human food, pet food, mink feed and poultry feed,” reports United Poultry Concerns. [17] While most layers do not make it into the food supply, some show chlorine contamination via commercial feed, which passes into their eggs. [18]

Both broilers and layers live in ghastly conditions in concentrated poultry houses, as recent films like “Fresh” and “Food, Inc.” revealed. Chickens raised for human consumption eat genetically modified feed laced with antibiotics. They are bred for large breasts – beyond what their legs can support. Not that there is room for mobility – most live in 68 square inches of space. A US farmer told Russian bloggers: [19]

“‘Modern’ poultry production condemns the poor chickens to living in their own filth leading to all kinds of problems from breathing in the fecal dust and excess ammonia.

“This produces a meat that is less than firm and very absorbent. This absorbency is terrible for us because of what happens when the chicken is cleaned. Because processing is highly mechanized... many intestines are torn during evisceration thereby soiling many of the carcasses, which are then ‘sterilized’ in a chlorine bath (better known as a fecal bath) which the absorbent meat sponges up for us to later eat.”

The difference in taste and texture between chlorinated, drugged chicken and organic, fresh chicken is obvious.

Vaccines not needed

The salmonella outbreak which began in the Spring has sickened 1,470 people. [20] This comprises only one percent of 142,000 cases each year. [21]

Both companies involved in the egg recall, Hillandale Farms and Wright County Egg, use vaccinated hens. Wright spent over half a million dollars on vaccines, and 80 percent of Hillandale's supply is vaccinated, yet salmonella managed to survive. [22]

The pharmaceutical industry, of course, pushes vaccines. Inactivated salmonella vaccines, as well as live and genetically modified ones, are used. One of the three main suppliers in the US, Lohmann Animal Health International, asserts, "Vaccination programs must be a major component of Salmonella control programs." [23]

However, the new egg rules of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which became effective on July 9, do not require vaccines. Field trials did not conclusively prove them to be effective. Instead, the FDA mandated egg refrigeration and increased testing, cleaning and inspection, and only encourages vaccine use. [24]

Even assuming vaccine efficacy, they are not needed. In its apologetic statement this week [1], the Iowa Poultry Association reminded the public that the Centers for Disease Control and the FDA "both state that thoroughly cooked eggs are thoroughly safe eggs.

"Consumers should know that Salmonella is destroyed by the heat of proper cooking. Eggs should be cooked until the whites and yolks are firm. For dishes containing eggs, the internal temperature should reach 160 °F."

Russia's Institute of Public Health agrees. "People don't need to worry a lot about these infected chickens because, in fact, all of them are infected.... To avoid contamination, you should carefully wash the chicken and expose it to high temperatures until it becomes grey." [25]

Since proper cooking kills salmonella, and thorough cooking kills salmonella, why vaccinate the hens? The massive hype from corporate media about the need for more drugs in the food supply can only serve to generate profits for Big Pharma.

Antibiotic overuse

Chickens raised for human consumption are fed a steady stream of antibiotics. Although the FDA concluded ten years ago that this has led to drug resistance, [26] little has been done to end the practice. A renewed effort is now gaining traction.

The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act ("PAMTA") (HR 1549, S 619) would ban giving antibiotics to healthy farm animals. [27] The Union of Concerned Scientists explains:

"An estimated 70 percent of all antibiotics used in the United States are regularly added to the feed of livestock and poultry that are not sick—a practice with serious consequences for our health. Bacteria that are constantly exposed to antibiotics develop antibiotic resistance. This means that when humans get sick from resistant bacteria, the antibiotics prescribed by doctors don't work." [28]

As to hens raised to produce eggs, Steve Roach, a Program Director for Food Animal Concerns Trust, [29] told Food Freedom that "bacitracin, erythromycin, and tylosin are approved for increasing lay." They may be legally used "in the 20 weeks before they go into production."

This is where it gets tricky. “The last two [drugs] are considered critically important with respect to human health and the potential for resistance.”

The group, Health Care Without Harm, provides a list of organizations in support of PAMTA and more resources for further reading. [30] You can also sign their petition in support of the bill. [31]

On September 16, you can listen to an hour-long webinar on “Superbugs, Super Problems: Agricultural Antibiotics and Emerging Infections.” The program starts at 1 pm EDT. You must pre-register. [32] Three of the speakers recently testified before Congress on the issue.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy notes that one result of antibiotics overuse “is the emergence of new infections with farm links, including Salmonella resistant to multiple drugs (including the critical cephalosporins), resistant E coli, and MRSA.”

Buy Local: It’s safer and improves the local economy

As Russia weighs the benefits of cheaper, but chemically and biologically contaminated chicken from the US versus safer, locally raised poultry, it should consider its superior position. Not a part of the World Trade Organization, Russia does not have to sacrifice quality and can force the US to clean up its act. Half of all US exports to Russia comprised chicken – amounting to \$900 million in 2008. [33] That’s a hefty bit of leverage.

Nations are well-advised to consider food safety and food security before allowing our chemically adulterated supply into their markets.

US food has been attributed to our skyrocketing rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Recall that industry insiders run government agencies, a fact widely reported by watchdog groups. Also consider the recent push by US officials to get people to eat seafood from the Gulf of Mexico, despite scientific reports cautioning against it because of the destructive use of toxic oil dispersants, as well as the 200-plus million gallons of oil spilled. [34]

Instead of throwing another drug at filthy, concentrated animal feeding operations, safe and environmentally friendly alternatives abound. One is to raise your own backyard chickens. Author Patricia Foreman provides five good reasons to raise your own small flock in her new book “City Chicks: Keeping Micro-flocks of Chickens as Garden Helpers, Compost Makers, Bio-recyclers, and Local Food Producers.”

The Rodale Institute summarized her work [35]: In addition to giving you complete control over egg quality, it turns out the easily raised birds are also good for soil and gardens, and reduce landfills by recycling your organic waste.

Supporting local agriculture benefits local economies, reduces pollution and lowers the risk of pathogenic spread. A decentralized food system provides food security and economic sovereignty far superior to any trade agreement across borders.

NOTES

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