One Health: Everyone’s Responsibility

*Antibiotics, when used properly, keep humans and animals healthy. Here’s how the nation’s pig farmers practice good stewardship.*

Farmers and ranchers spend each day giving their animals proper nutrition, shelter and care. But when animals get sick, they call the veterinarian.

Liz Wagstrom, chief veterinarian with the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), says veterinarians care for animals in the same way that doctors care for patients. Sometimes they must rely on antibiotics to relieve suffering.

“We have veterinarians having the responsibility to write an order or a prescription when medically important antibiotics are used by farmers. The veterinarian has that judgement to say an animal is sick; they need to have antibiotics,” Wagstrom says.

Antibiotics use has sparked debate in recent years as resistance problems rise. The National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) is among the organizations supporting a One Health solution – where human and animal health professions work together to stem the problem.

Wagstrom says resistance is a topic of concern, but its causes are often misunderstood – with agriculture often getting more than its fair share of the blame.

“A lot of the human resistance problems that are seen in hospitals, especially, probably are unrelated to agriculture. It’s everybody’s shared responsibility, whether it’s a medical doctor and their patients or whether it’s a veterinarian and producers to do everything we can to minimize the development of resistance or the spread of resistance,” Wagstrom says.
“I think there’s some misunderstandings about the role that agriculture may play in the bigger picture of antibiotic resistance. But whether that role is small or big, we need to do everything we can to take care of our responsibility in our part we can play.”

To promote good stewardship on pig farms, more than 70,000 farmers and personnel have completed an educational program called Pork Quality Assurance Plus. It includes training materials, on-farm assessments and some third-party audits to promote the best care and responsible antibiotics practices.

“The principles include things like doing everything to reduce the need to use antibiotics. So take the best care of our pigs, use our best facilities, our best care-taking options to reduce that need to use antibiotics. If we need to use them, make sure they’re used under veterinary oversight,” she says.

“I think that we have a lot of misunderstanding with products that may be labeled never-ever antibiotics or no antibiotics ever. As a veterinarian, that concerns me some in that I would hate to see an animal denied treatment when they need it,” Wagstrom adds. “So, I’m very comfortable that we can responsibly raise animals, treat those that need it, and put a safe, wholesome product on the table.”

Learn more about this important topic during NIAA’s 9th Annual Antibiotic Symposium, Oct. 15-17, in Ames, Iowa. Visit animalagriculture.org for more information or to register for next week’s event.

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NIAA and Merck Animal Health are committed to a One Health approach in the fight against antimicrobial resistance.

About One Health:
The One Health series is brought to you by the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) with leadership and technical support from Merck Animal Health. NIAA and Merck Animal Health are committed to understanding and finding solutions to antimicrobial resistance from animal health, human health and environmental perspectives. The One Health initiative is a collaborative effort between leaders in each of these areas and includes outreach to inform both consumers and producers. The goal: Responsible antibiotics use.

About NIAA:
The National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) was established to derive solutions on the most current issues in animal agriculture. Its members include producers, veterinarians, scientists, and government and allied industry representatives. NIAA is dedicated to programs that work toward the eradication of diseases that pose a risk to the health of animals, wildlife and humans. It also promotes a safe and wholesome food supply and best practices for animal health and well-being as well as environmental stewardship. More information is available at animalagriculture.org