



American consumers are eating a strange brew of drugs and hormones that livestock producers are using to spur their animals to grow more quickly.(doctor_k/Shutterstock)

PREMIUM CANCER

New Generation of Livestock Drugs Linked to Cancer

As US regulators restrict antibiotic use, livestock producers turn to vaccines, hormones, and other problematic drugs

BY MARTHA ROSENBERG TIME JUNE 5, 2022 PRINT

Many people know about the routine use of antibiotics in **livestock** production—and object to it. The drugs are profitable to meat producers because they cause animals to gain **more weight** with less feed and prevent the outbreak of disease in often cramped concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFOs) conditions.

In 2017, the Food and Drug Administration **began** regulatory measures to prevent the use of livestock antibiotics for growth purposes and **recently** finalized the guidances. Injudicious antibiotic use drives the development of antibiotic-resistant **bacteria**.

As the extent of antibiotic residues and antibiotic-resistant bacteria in meat has been **revealed**, there has been a public backlash against the drugs' use, resulting in some meat producers labeling their products "raised without antibiotics." The problem consumers are unaware that other drugs are now being used in meat production and left off the labels. Worse, in an effort to reduce the publicly spurned antibiotics, meat producers are turning to vaccines.

"Vaccines and other alternative products can help minimize the need for antibiotics by preventing and controlling infectious diseases in animal populations, and are central to the future success of animal agriculture," read a 2018 article in **Veterinary Research**.

How prevalent are livestock vaccines? Drugmaker Merck markets **58 poultry vaccines** for diseases that food consumers neither know about nor probably *want* to know about like coccidiosis, infectious bronchitis, Newcastle disease, infectious laryngotracheitis, mycoplasma gallisepticum, Marek's disease (**chicken herpes**), infectious bursal disease, hemorrhagic enteritis, rhinotracheitis (turkey coryza), avian encephalomyelitis, fowl pox, and more.

In addition to vaccines for **cattle**, **swine**, and **fish**, food animals are also vaccinated as embryos.

By 2020, the animal vaccine market was estimated to be **\$7.2 billion**.