



September 26, 2015 – Grand Rapids, MI

Prove It

The final opinion I'm going to share began with a recently published report titled "Chain Reaction: How Top Restaurants Rate on Reducing Use of Antibiotic in their Meat Supply." It was published by a number of environmental groups. It's free and you can get a copy by clicking on the link in the references. Read it and you can form your own opinion on what they did and how they did it.

The problem I have is what they didn't do. Assuming this is a significant issue, you have to prove that there are antibiotics in the meat supply. They spent a lot of time talking about antibiotic-resistant bacteria (ARB), how the ARB could spread from animal to person a variety of ways, and how it has been found on meat. Fine. I've seen the data on that and it's true to some extent. That's why we handle meat carefully and cook it thoroughly.

What they did not prove was that there were antibiotics in the meat served in restaurants. They didn't cite studies that show there were antibiotics in the meat we buy from the supermarket. Using a non-validated survey, a grading system they developed, and public statements by the chain restaurants, these groups ranked the restaurants on whether they were reducing the use of antibiotics in their supply chain. But they didn't prove that there were antibiotics in the meat they serve. That would seem to be just as important an issue as ARB if not more important; we all know by now that repeated exposure to antibiotics causes resistance in humans as well as animals.

As I talked with several people about it, some replied quite vehemently that there were antibiotics in the meat we eat. My reply was the same as it would be to the environmental groups: prove it. I couldn't find any data to support that and while they talked a lot, they had nothing to show other than things written by vegetarian support groups without any science to support their claims. By the way, sticking your finger in my face to tell me I'm wrong isn't a good idea. What is a good idea is to show me some research to support the claim.



I understand that the point of the report was to talk about ARB and the potential dangers to humans. Fine. Using data they cited in their report from the CDC, some 2,000,000 people per year catch an antibiotic-resistant bacterial infection; 23,000 people die from it, particularly those with weakened immune systems. That's a tragedy. But let's put this in perspective. There are 330 million people in the U.S.; let's say that people eat some form of meat, poultry, or eggs once a day. That would average out for those who are vegetarians and those who eat some meat three times a day; 365 days in a year times 330 million potential exposures per day would yield over 120 billion exposures per year. Therefore the risk of getting an antibiotic-resistant bacterial infection is 0.002%. That's extremely low; I'll take those odds.

I want to protect our food supply and our environment from the things we do to damage it. I want to raise food without pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics, or hormones. I also want the information presented in a way that isn't dramatic or unrealistic and most of all, I want it to be true. If you're going to make a claim, you're simply going to have to prove it.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

Reference: http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/877/d8/f/6472/FOE_ChainReactionReport.pdf



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