



09-02-09

Science-based beef industry opposes fear-based legislation

By Jon H. Harsch

© Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.

The Denver-based National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) is one group gearing up for Congress returning to Washington, DC on September 8th. In a briefing session Wednesday, NCBA's Beef Safety Research Executive Director Mandy Carr outlined the industry's comprehensive program to constantly improve beef safety "from the pasture to the plate."

Dr. Carr and NCBA Legislative Affairs Manager Kristina Butts explained the importance of convincing Congress not to rush into passing legislation introduced by Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) which would limit or ban routine non-therapeutic use of animal antibiotics. Carr and Butts pointed out that far more research needs to be done before any conclusions could be drawn regarding charges that the livestock industry's use of antibiotics may have led to increased antibiotics resistance among humans.

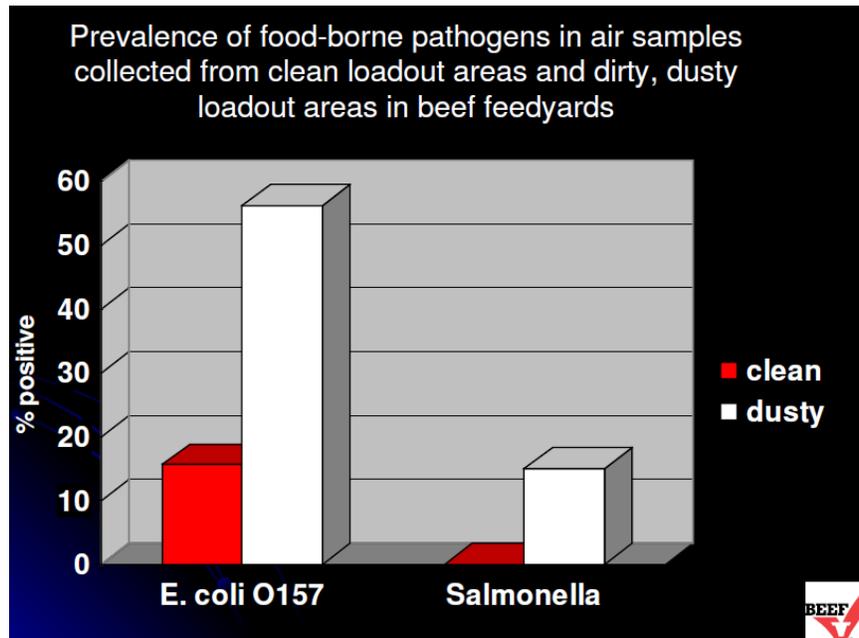
The beef industry itself spends some \$350 million a year on food safety research. This research includes efforts to control toxic types of E. coli which have caused recent illness outbreaks. Carr discussed advances such as the development of vaccines and feed additives which have proven very effective in reducing E. coli problems. Butts said that instead of focusing narrowly on an antibiotics ban not based on science, Congress instead should provide needed research funding which the '08 Farm Bill authorized but which hasn't been appropriated.

Carr and Butts insist that animal antibiotics are used sparingly, as needed, to maintain herd health and that low-dose use to prevent disease is preferable to "using more antibiotics later on." To make sure cattlemen can continue current practices, Butts is monitoring all legislation in case the Slaughter antibiotics bill gets added to health care, food safety, or some other piece of legislation.

Butts points out that the beef industry takes "great pride in making sure that we are not going to be contributing to antibiotic resistance" and that producers "base everything that they do on sound science." She also explains that the industry relies heavily on science and best practices to continually improve industry efficiency. She says that "We don't have a preference at NCBA or as an industry. There are a lot of niche opportunities with

organic beef, grass-fed beef, and we support all of that. But it is important to know that organic and grass-fed operations cannot feed our country, much less the rest of the world. We're able to do that with the conventional technologies we have in place, all based on science."

The following two slides illustrate two examples of how Beef Checkoff research has identified E. coli breeding grounds and new control technologies.



Source: Dr. Mandy Carr, Executive Director, Beef Safety Research, National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Beef Industry's Commitment to Safety

- Interventions (prior to plant pre-harvest)
 - Phages
 - Viruses that target specific bacteria
 - Have been widely used in Eastern Europe in place of antibiotics
 - Invade targeted bacteria, replicate, kill the bacterium, but not other bacteria

100 nm

BEEF

Source: Dr. Mandy Carr, Executive Director, Beef Safety Research, National Cattlemen's Beef Association