

NEWS RELEASE

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More Than Half of Top 25 Restaurant Chains Commit to Responsible Antibiotics Use in Chicken, But Progress on Beef and Pork Still Lags

Annual Antibiotics Scorecard Shows KFC is Most Improved; 11 Others Get Fs

More than half of the top 25 chain restaurants in the U.S. have taken steps to restrict the routine use of antibiotics in the production of the chicken they serve, according to a new scorecard released today by a group of consumer, environmental and public health organizations. The third annual Chain Reaction report, which grades the companies on their antibiotics policies and practices, found that 14 restaurants have taken action, up from nine just one year ago. While restaurant chains made great progress on chicken, the groups found that there were no new commitments to limit antibiotic use in beef and pork.

Seventy percent of the medically important antibiotics in the U.S. are sold for use in livestock, and they are typically used to prevent disease in crowded and unsanitary industrial farms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other leading medical experts agree that the widespread use of antibiotics for meat production threatens public health by contributing to the creation and spread of drug-resistant superbugs. According to the CDC, drug-resistant infections sicken at least two million people every year and at least 23,000 die as a result. Given stagnating federal policy over the misuse of antibiotics in meat production, the groups urged restaurants to do their part to protect public health.

“We must stop squandering antibiotics on animals that aren’t sick at a time when these vital medications are losing their ability to fight infections in people,” said Jean Halloran, Director of Food Policy Initiatives at Consumers Union, the policy and mobilization arm of Consumer Reports. “Fast food restaurants have tremendous market power and should use their leverage to help address this public health crisis by ending the misuse of antibiotics.”

“When it comes to chicken nuggets, we’ve seen incredible change in a few short years—but burgers and bacon are another story,” said Lena Brook, food policy advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council. “To keep our life-saving antibiotics working when people need them, the entire meat industry—beef and pork included—must start using them responsibly.”

The *Chain Reaction III* report was produced by Consumers Union, Natural Resources Defense Council, Food Animal Concerns Trust, Friends of the Earth, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, and Center for Food Safety. Among its key findings:

- Panera and Chipotle remain industry leaders and earned “A” grades for having comprehensive policies restricting the use of antibiotics in nearly all beef, pork, turkey and chicken served in their stores. Subway has made a commitment to implement a similar policy by 2025.
- While more than half the top chains have made commitments on chicken, 22 out of 25 restaurants have not adopted time-bound commitments for limiting use of antibiotics in pork and beef. McDonald’s recently outlined a global vision for reducing antibiotics in beef and pork, but has not provided any details or set a timeline for achieving it.
- KFC is the “most improved” restaurant in this year’s scorecard, earning a “B-” compared to the “F” it received last year. In March, KFC, which only serves chicken, made a commitment to only purchase birds raised without medically important antibiotics by the end of 2018.
- Six restaurants, all with strong antibiotics policies for chicken, received grades of “B+” to “C-” (Subway, Chick-fil-A, KFC, Taco Bell, McDonald’s, and Wendy’s).
- The sweeping changes in chicken antibiotics policies in the restaurant sector have contributed to big improvements across the poultry industry. Close to half of U.S. chicken is raised by suppliers that follow responsible antibiotics practices or that have pledged to do so in the near future.
- Six restaurants received a “D” grade for a number of reasons, including having limited policies, lack of implementation, and/or insufficient auditing of suppliers to ensure compliance: Pizza Hut, Starbucks, Dunkin’ Donuts, Jack in the Box, Burger King, and Papa John’s.
- Eleven restaurants earned “F” grades for failing to adopt and disclose effective antibiotics stewardship policies: Sonic, Cracker Barrel, Olive Garden, Applebee’s, Domino’s Pizza, Chili’s, Little Caesars, Buffalo Wild Wings, Dairy Queen, Arby’s, and IHOP.

“Drug-resistant bacteria are killing thousands of Americans and sickening millions every year, so we need a big player to step up and address antibiotic use in pork and beef,” said Matthew Wellington, Antibiotics Program Director for U.S. PIRG Education Fund. “McDonald’s changed its chicken suppliers, and recently put out a strong vision to address misuse in pork and beef. By turning this vision into a reality, McDonald’s can pressure the meat industry to cut the rampant misuse of life-saving antibiotics that fuels these superbugs.”

“While more than half of the companies surveyed have made commitments on antibiotics, large chains like Olive Garden continue to drag their feet,” said Kari Hamerschlag, deputy director of food and technology at Friends of the Earth. “Customers are looking for healthier dining options that include meat produced without drugs. If companies like Olive Garden refuse to implement responsible changes, they will see consumers and shareholders take their dollars to restaurants that don’t put public health at risk.”

“Commitments from restaurants have helped to spur positive change in the industry, but strong federal policies prohibiting all routine uses of antibiotics in food animal production are still needed,” said Cameron Harsh, Senior Manager for Organic and Animal Policy at Center for Food Safety. “Without strong regulations that hold everyone to higher standards, bad actors in the industry can continue business as usual and put public health at risk.”

“The commitments made by the fast food industry have definitely helped in the struggle against superbugs, but across the board we need greater transparency,” said Steven Roach, Food Safety Program Director of Food Animal Concerns Trust. “Companies need to let customers know what they are doing to make sure their suppliers comply and even more importantly must begin requiring suppliers to report on how much antibiotics they are using.”

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[Center for Food Safety](#)'s mission is to empower people, support farmers, and protect the earth from the harmful impacts of industrial agriculture. Through groundbreaking legal, scientific, and grassroots action, we protect and promote your right to safe food and the environment. Please join our more than 900,000 advocates across the country at www.centerforfoodsafety.org. Twitter: [@CFSTrueFood](#), [@CFS_Press](#)

[Consumers Union](#) is the policy and mobilization division of Consumer Reports. Consumers Union works for health reform, food and product safety, financial reform, and other consumer issues in Washington, D.C., the states, and in the marketplace. Consumer Reports is the world's largest independent product-testing organization. Using its more than 50 labs, auto test center, and survey research center, the nonprofit rates thousands of products and services annually. Founded in 1936, Consumer Reports has over 8 million subscribers to its magazine, website, and other publications.

[Food Animal Concerns Trust](#) expands safe and humanely raised food options by supporting humane farmers and advocating against antibiotic overuse and harmful drugs in farm animals. Our Humane Farming Program invests in family farmers seeking to raise their animals humanely by providing them with grants, scholarships, and webinars. Our Food Safety Program advocates for stronger corporate and federal policies that eliminate the overuse of antibiotics and veterinary drugs known to be harmful to consumers. Together they expand safe and humane practices on farms across the country.

[Friends of the Earth](#) fights to create a more healthy and just world. Our current campaigns focus on promoting clean energy and solutions to climate change, ensuring the food we eat and products we use are safe and sustainable, and protecting marine ecosystems and the people who live and work near them.

[The Natural Resources Defense Council](#) (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 2 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Bozeman, Montana, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter [@NRDC](#).

[U.S. PIRG Education Fund](#) is an independent, non-partisan group that works for consumers and the public interest. Through research, public education and outreach, we serve as counterweights to the influence of powerful special interests that threaten our health, safety or well-being.