CADE
Center for
Agricultural Development
& Entrepreneurship

A Guide for Public School District Food Purchasers

On adopting a Beef Procurement Specification to Help Combat Antibiotics Resistance

Background

Overuse of antibiotics in animals and people is causing the emergence of antibiotic resistant 'superbugs'. These bacteria have created a growing public health crisis of infections in people where antibiotics are no longer effective. Last month, a new UN report stated that "alarming levels of resistance have been reported in countries of all income levels, with the result being that common diseases are becoming untreatable, and lifesaving medical procedures riskier to perform." They project that deaths from these infections could increase to 10 million a year by 2050 from the current 700,000 annual deaths worldwide.

While the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) already regulate and test meat to ensure food does not contain antibiotic residue in beef sold on the market, the practice of blanket treatment of groups of cattle to prevent infection is increasing the occurrence of bacteria that are resistant to previously effective antibiotics.

The FDA recently reported that livestock receive 65 percent of the total amount of antibiotics administered to humans and animals in the U.S. Cattle receive 41 percent of livestock portion, which amounts to 25 percent of all antibiotics used in the U.S. in people and livestock.

The New York State Department of Health established the NYS Antimicrobial Resistance Prevention and Control Task Force, which developed Stop Antibiotic Resistance Roadmap (STARR) to combat the growing threat of antibiotic resistance. One of its recommendations is reducing the inappropriate use of antibiotics in livestock.

Why Add a Beef Procurement Specification for Antibiotic Stewardship?

There are several reasons why you, the person responsible for overseeing food procurement/bid specifications for K-12 schools, may consider adopting this new beef procurement standard in your farm-to-school food purchasing bids. Doing so will:

- align your public school purchasing standard with New York State's public health priorities;
- play a role in protecting against antibiotic-resistant bacteria that cause infection and illness;
- ensure your school keeps up with farm-to-school procurement good practices; and

- communicate to farmers that you, as a buyer, understand they can raise healthy cattle with much less antibiotics, and that you will use your purchasing power to support and reward farms that do so.

What is the connection between this Beef Procurement Specification and Reduction in Antibiotic use?

For any beef vendor to win a school food contact with you, they must follow two key principles in livestock production practices:

1) Reduce the rate of infection in animals through improved on-farm management of animals. For instance, cattle are at lower risk of infection if they are less crowded, have better nutrition, experience lower stress-levels, and get proper vaccinations (just like humans). With improved management of animals, farmers can increase animal welfare, and reduce infection risk and the need for antibiotics.
2) Identify specific animals at high risk of infection and ONLY treat those individual animals, rather than routine or blanket treatment of groups of animals.

These practices work. Dr. Daryl Nydam a Veterinarian and Epidemiologist at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, worked with a group of NY dairy farms using these principles. His research demonstrated 60-70 percent reduction of antibiotic use to treat and prevent clinical mastitis without harming production or the wellbeing of cows.

How do I integrate the Specification in our Procurement Bid?

Here's the language you can use in your school beef procurement bid to support enhanced on-farm antibiotic stewardship (feel free to cut and paste!):

"To help combat antibiotic resistance in animal and human medicine, meat will be sourced from farms with antibiotic practices that not only follow all current FDA regulations but also lower risk of infection with improved management, and limit antibiotic use to treat clinically ill animals; or to prevent anticipated disease in specific animals identified as being at high risk of infection."

How Do I verify that Bidding Vendors Comply with the Specification?

Beef in New York comes from dairy farms and from non-dairy beef farms. The wording of the school procurement specification above spells out an upper limit of how farms use antibiotics. Farms that already practice this enhanced on-farm antibiotic stewardship will be unaffected and still able to sell to a school using the spec with proper documentation (see below for sample affidavit).

Farms that already meet the spec include organic producers and many of NY's non-dairy beef producers. In New York, a growing minority of dairy producers meet the specifications, but most do not.

The following language describes the documentation that vendors should be required to include in their bids to verify compliance (feel free to cut and paste!):

"Each farm from where the beef is sourced must supply an affidavit confirming that their on-farm antibiotic practice conforms to the spec (see attached affidavit sample). The affidavit(s) must be submitted with the vendor's bid."

Note: vendors bidding on beef products often include a mix of beef sourced from multiple farms. Thus, vendors must provide an affidavit from each source farm to demonstrate they are meeting the spec. Also note: farm identification and affidavit collection from cattle purchased at auction is very important as farm names and practices are often unavailable with auction purchases.

To help guide your conversations with potential vendors on whether they meet the spec, you can also use the following lines of inquiry:

1) Non-dairy beef vendors. Many non-dairy beef producers in New York already have antibiotic use practices that meet or exceed the spec. These complying farms include: organic producers; other producers who never use antibiotics; those who use no antibiotics for prevention or control. ***If you're thinking about purchasing from a non-dairy beef farm, ask them if they use antibiotics for prevention, and how.***
2) Dairy beef vendors. Dairy farms are a major source of ground beef and ground beef products in New York State. Currently, most dairy farms in New York do not meet the spec because many administer antibiotics to each cow once a year to prevent mastitis--known as "blanket dry cow treatment". This practice does not fit under the spec. Dairy farms that do comply with the spec are: organic farms and farms that use "*selective* dry cow treatment" of individual high risk animals, such as those that participate in the selective dry cow treatment offered through Cornell. ***If you're thinking about buying beef directly from a dairy farm, you should ask them if they routinely administer "blanket dry cow treatment" on all cows. If so, they do not meet the spec.***

What if I have questions?
For assistance, feel free to reach out to:

Phoebe Schreiner, Executive Director, CADE
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Chloe Boutelle, Farm-to-School Coordinator, CCE Tompkins County Farm-to-School Project (Coordinator who piloted the procurement standard)
Contact: ceb367@cornell.edu

SAMPLE

ENHANCED ON-FARM ANTIBIOTIC STEWARDSHIP AFFIDAVIT

As the owner of [name of farm] supplying livestock to [purchaser], I certify and agree that:

- Our farm follows all current FDA and USDA regulations which disallow administration of any antimicrobial drug production purposes including enhanced growth or improved feed efficiency.
- Our farm uses management practices to reduce the rate of infection through improved animal welfare.
- Our farm only uses antibiotics to treat clinically ill animals or to prevent infection in selected individual animals identified to be at high risk of infection.
- Our farm does not administer blanket antibiotic treatment to groups of animals for prevention.

_____	_____
Farm Name	Date Signed
_____	_____
Printed Name of Farmer	Signature of Farmer
_____	
_____	_____
Farm Address	Office or Mobile Phone