

Stop Use of Antibiotics to Plump Up Animals, Centre directs States

Government fears drug resistance through food chain

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NEW DELHI

Feared spread of antibiotic resistance through the food chain, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) and the agriculture ministry have directed state governments to stop the use of antibiotics and hormones in animal feed.

They have also called for strict implementation of a 2012 law, which mandates a gap between the time an animal is given a drug for medical purposes and sale of food products from that animal.

"Antibiotics are also used as feed premix for regular feeding in poultry and animals used for meat, milk and egg production. This kind of regular feeding of antibiotics has serious consequences on human beings since residue of antibiotics may accumulate in milk, meat and eggs," the agriculture ministry said in a directive to state governments last week.

"Consumption of antibiotic contaminated meat, milk and eggs may develop antibiotic resistance in both animals and human beings," it said, adding that "use of antibiotics and hormones in animal feed should be stopped." The DCGI has sent similar directions to its state counterparts.

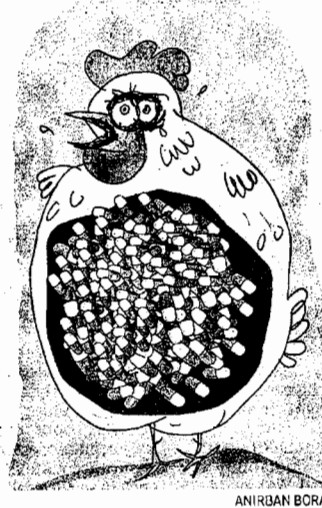
While the European Union had imposed a ban on antibiotic growth promoters in animals in 2006, the US started phasing out some of these six months back.

Antibiotics are added to the feed of cattle, poultry and other food-producing animals to help them gain weight faster or use less food to gain weight. A US consumer report of 2012 reckoned that about 80% of all antibiotics sold in the US market are used by the meat and poultry industry. Many popular fast-food chains there such as Chik-fil-A and Panera Bread have vowed to serve antibiotic-free meat in years to come.

India's move comes within a month of a World Health Organization (WHO) report warning that antimicrobial resistance is an increasingly serious threat in every part of the world.

"The idea is to cut the misuse of antibiotics in animals by phasing out these practices completely but it would be done while sensitising farmers about the risk it poses to health of people," said a government official.

Last month, the WHO called this problem so serious that it threatens the achievements of modern medicine while counting lack of country-wise data on anti-bacterial resistance in food-producing animals as a major challenge. It added that in many countries, the total amount of antibiotics used in



animals measured as gross weight, exceeds the quantity used in the treatment of disease in humans.

The poultry industry claims that implementation in this largely unorganised sector would pose a huge challenge but admits that if it is strictly enforced, the industry may take a hit.

"The production cost will go up and productivity might fall if the government implements the proposal. Many foreign bacterial diseases, particularly relating to E Coli and Salmonella, might come back," said B Soundararajan, managing director of Coimbatore-based Suguna Group, which clocks annual sales of ₹5,200 crore and produces a fifth of the chicken India eats. He added that the use of antibiotics in Indian poultry sector is not alarming.

Satish Pal, president of Poultry Federation of India, said implementing this move in the ₹55,000-crore Indian poultry industry, 70% of which lies outside the organised sector, would be a herculean task.

"A broiler farmer may still not sell his bird after giving antibiotic dose for 5-7 days, but what will a layer farmer do? He can't throw away the eggs," he said. Layers are grown only to lay eggs, whereas broilers are grown for flesh. Pal, however, claims that the situation has improved on the ground over the last few years. "Earlier, farmers were giving anything which could increase production and control mortality rate. Things have improved but government needs to advertise and reach out further in rural areas," he said.

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