

October 20, 2016

Secretary Tom Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We are writing to you to request that your agency offer chicken produced with certified responsible antibiotic use to schools through the USDA Foods Program.¹

In the United States, more than 70 percent of antibiotics important to human medicine are actually sold for use on livestock, often in animals that are not sick. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization warn this use contributes to the growth and spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria—traveling from farms to our communities through people, soil, air, water, and the food we eat. Leading health experts caution that the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria increases the numbers of infections in people that may be more difficult to treat, require longer and more expensive hospital visits, and pose more fatal and non-fatal health risks. The USDA, too, has acknowledged that eliminating the routine use of human antibiotics in livestock and poultry production will slow the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Many schools around the country have sought to purchase, or expressed interest in, chicken raised without the routine use of medically important antibiotics. For example, 2013 fifteen large districts working with School Food Focus prioritized developing the supply of and purchasing such chicken, and in 2014, the Urban School Food Alliance—a coalition of six of the largest school districts in the U.S.—committed to purchasing only chicken raised without the unnecessary use of medically important antibiotics. Large school districts like this have been able to use their substantial purchasing power to negotiate rates directly with chicken producers.

However, the more than 14,000 school districts nationwide would be better able to extend the same benefits to their students if USDA provides access to more responsibly raised meat through their national purchasing program.

As you know, USDA Foods buys food in bulk and offers them to schools nationwide, generally at a lower price than the commercial market—and many schools use this program to purchase their chicken. However, currently the program does not offer certified responsible antibiotic use chicken. By including chicken raised with better antibiotics practices in USDA Foods, the agency would make it drastically more accessible for many more schools nationwide. And by listing this popular product, the USDA could have an immediate impact not only on improving school meals, but also in helping fight the growing public health threats from antibiotic

¹ Here and throughout, certified responsible antibiotic use will mean meeting requirements of the School Food Focus Certified Responsible Antibiotic Use Standard (September 29, 2016), available here: http://www.schoolfoodfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2016/05/CRAU-Rationale-and-Standard_FIN.pdf.

resistant bacteria nationwide.

For all these reasons, we respectfully urge the agency to make chicken available for schools to purchase through the USDA Foods program that meet a policy standard where medically important antibiotics are only used to treat sick animals or to combat an identified disease exposure, that is certified responsible antibiotic use.

Sincerely,

Laura Rogers, Deputy Director
Antibiotic Resistance Action Center
George Washington Milken Institute School of Public Health

Justine Fischer, President
California PTA

Charles Margulis, Media Director
Center for Environmental Health

David Plunkett, Senior Staff Attorney, Food Safety Program
Center for Science in the Public Interest

Chef Ann Cooper, President and Founder
Chef Ann Foundation

Tarah DeClemente, Manager of Health Promotion
Chicago Public Schools

Cynthia Downs, Executive Director
Cobb County School District

Ben Thomas, Procurement Specialist
Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Betti Wiggins, Executive Director
Detroit Public Schools Community District

Peter Lehner, Director of Sustainable Food and Agriculture Program
Earthjustice

Steve Roach, Food Safety Program Director
Food Animal Concerns Trust

Joann Lo, Executive Director
Food Chain Workers Alliance

Cecily Upton, Co-Founder
Food Corps

Jennifer Spitz, Co-Producer
Food Patriots

Stacia Clinton, National Director, Healthy Food in Health Care
Health Care Without Harm

Rochelle Davis, President and CEO
Healthy Schools Campaign

Bertrand Weber, Food Service Director
Minneapolis School District

Monifa Bandele, Senior Campaign Director
MomsRising

Margaret Brown, Staff Attorney
Natural Resources Defense Council

Miguel Villarreal, Director of Food and Nutritional Services
Novato Unified School District

Jennifer LeBarre, Executive Director Nutrition Services
Oakland Unified School District

Gitta Grether-Sweeney, Senior Director, Nutrition Services
Portland Public Schools

Fred Espinosa, Food Services Manager of Production and Acquisition
San Diego Unified School District

Orla O'Keeffe, Chief of Policy and Operations
San Francisco Unified School District

Wayne Grasela, Senior Vice President, Food Services
School District of Philadelphia

Toni Liquori, Founder and Executive Director
School Food Focus

Bettina Elias Siegel, Founder
The Lunch Tray

Eric Goldstein, Chairman
Urban School Food Alliance

Steve Blackledge, Public Health Program Director
U.S. Public Interest Research Group

Nancy Easton, Executive Director and Co-Founder
Wellness in the Schools