

# CHAIN REACTION II



How Top Restaurants Rate on Reducing  
Use of Antibiotics in Their Meat Supply



## **Acknowledgements**

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The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of our organizations' supporters or reviewers.

## Executive Summary

America's biggest restaurant chains feed millions of people billions of pounds of beef, chicken, turkey and pork every year. The vast majority of this meat is produced in industrial-scale facilities where thousands and even tens of thousands of animals at a time are routinely fed antibiotics to help them survive and make them grow faster in unsanitary, crowded and stressful conditions.<sup>1</sup> This misuse of antibiotics contributes to antibiotic resistance—the ability of bacteria to withstand exposure to an antibiotic. Antibiotic resistance makes treatment of bacterial infections harder, increases how long people are sick, and makes it more likely that patients will die.<sup>2</sup> Curbing the misuse of antibiotics in the meat industry is a public health imperative.

Increasingly, consumers are insisting on more sustainably-produced meat, including meat produced without the routine use of antibiotics. The 2015 Chain Reaction scorecard ranked America's 25 largest fast food and fast casual restaurant chains on their antibiotics use policies<sup>i</sup> and received widespread coverage in dozens of mainstream news outlets—an indication of significant public concern about this issue. This second annual scorecard and report, Chain Reaction II, highlights the problem of routine antibiotics use in the meat and poultry operations that supply the nation's top restaurant chains. It also identifies restaurant companies taking a leadership role in their industry by setting good antibiotics use policies, purchasing meat and poultry raised without the routine use of antibiotics,<sup>ii</sup> and increasing transparency about their practices. Restaurants are major meat buyers and they can create big positive ripple effects on meat production practices across the country by changing their sourcing policies.

This year, twice the number of surveyed companies received a passing grade compared to last year. This largely reflects partial commitments on the part of those moving to transition their chicken supplies away from routine use of antibiotics.<sup>2</sup> Most of these companies are now clustered in a peer group receiving grades in the “B” or “C” range (Subway, Chick-fil-A, McDonald's, Wendy's, Taco Bell). McDonald's earns an improved grade of “C+” for completing its transition of its chicken supply,



reporting that an impressive 100 percent of the chicken served at its roughly 14,000 U.S. restaurants is now raised without antibiotics important in human medicine.<sup>3, iii</sup> However, the company made no commitments for its beef and pork. Chick-fil-A, one of the first companies to announce a good antibiotics use policy in 2014 for its chicken (essentially everything it serves), stays put with a “B” grade, reporting that it has converted “more than 23 percent” of its chicken supply to chicken raised entirely without antibiotics to date, indicating only marginal progress over last year.<sup>4</sup>

Very little progress has been made on pork and beef. There are no new entrants into the small peer group of restaurant chains receiving an “A” grade, reserved for companies that have policies limiting the routine use of antibiotics across all the meat and poultry they serve and publicly affirming that the majority of their meat and poultry is sourced accordingly. Panera and Chipotle remain the only two receiving an “A”. However, Subway says it wants to join that group. Subway is the only restaurant chain to adopt a new antibiotics policy that applies to all types of meat it serves, leaping from an “F” last year to a “B” grade in this year's scorecard.

i The scorecard gives full credit for a publicly available company policy that prohibits the use of all antibiotics or antibiotics in classes used in human medicine for growth promotion or disease prevention. Treatment of sick animals and use to control a disease outbreak are acceptable.

ii Here and throughout, “meat raised without the routine use of antibiotics” refers both to all antibiotics and/or all antibiotics important in human medicine.

iii “Antibiotics important to human medicine” or “medically-important antibiotics” are antibiotics that are the same as, or similar to, classes of drugs used in human medicine. For example, the livestock antibiotic, tylosin, is a member of the macrolide class of antibiotics.

Two other companies, Pizza Hut and Papa John's, receive a "D" grade for making token efforts—i.e., setting good antibiotics use policies on chicken, but applying them only to a small fraction of their chicken purchases. Unfortunately, 16 of the top 25 fast food chains, including such very large ones as KFC and Burger King, have taken no action to reduce use of antibiotics in their supply chains. These companies received a grade of "F".

No doubt, the public-facing campaigns aimed at McDonald's, Subway, Yum! Brands (parent company to KFC, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut), Darden (owner of Olive Garden), and others, initiated by the organizations participating in this report and our allies, coupled with action by the investor community, are making a difference. Companies are on notice that their customers and shareholders will hold them accountable for drug use practices in their meat and poultry supply chains. Nonetheless, much swifter and more widespread action is needed from top restaurant chains and leading meat producers to get routine antibiotics use out of our meat supply.

The goal of the annual Chain Reaction survey and scorecard is to help consumers make educated choices about the meat they eat, and encourage the largest chains in the fast food and fast casual restaurant industry to improve their sourcing policies. By highlighting industry leaders and laggards, we hope to encourage more top restaurant chains to publicly adopt policies that prohibit the routine use of antibiotics in their meat and poultry supply chains. We also seek to promote greater overall transparency about restaurant purchasing policies, including use of antibiotics and other drugs by major meat and poultry producers supported by the restaurant industry.

However, the market alone will not stem the rising tide of antibiotic resistance. Ensuring consumers have more choice when it comes to purchasing meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics use will not address the broader risk of resistance from continued misuse of antibiotics in much of the meat industry. For that, we need the government to set rules across the industry that prohibit the routine use of antibiotics in food animal production for growth promotion and disease prevention, and to set baseline standards that limit acceptable use to treatment of sick animals and to control identified disease outbreaks. To date, government response to this major public health threat has been woefully inadequate.

Chain Reaction II Scorecard	
<b>A</b>	 
<b>B</b>	 
<b>C+</b>	
<b>C</b>	
<b>C-</b>	
<b>D+</b>	
<b>D</b>	
<b>F</b>	               

- 1 Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Protection. (2008). Putting Meat on the Table: Industrial Farm Animal Production in America. The Pew Charitable Trusts and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Retrieved from [http://www.ncifap.org/\\_images/PCIFAPFin.pdf](http://www.ncifap.org/_images/PCIFAPFin.pdf).
- 2 Cordova, Carmen. "Antibiotic Resistance: From the Farm to You," NRDC Fact Sheet, March 2015, <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/antibiotic-resistance-farms-FS.pdf>
- 3 McDonald's, "McDonald's USA Announces Big Changes to its Food," McDonald's Newsroom, August 1 2016, <http://news.mcdonalds.com/US/news-stories/2016/McDonald-s-USA-Announces-Big-Changes-to-its-Food>.
- 4 Chick-fil-A, "Chickens Raised With No Antibiotics Ever," <http://www.chick-fil-a.com/Antibiotic-Free>, accessed August 2, 2016.