

## National Resource Defense Council reverses course, acknowledges 'factory farms' do not overuse antibiotics

California Governor Jerry Brown has sided with the usually-anti-science National Resources Defense Council and vetoed a bill that would have forced factory farms to adhere to US Food and Drug Administration standards.

Yes, the governor of California and the NRDC *don't* want farms to use FDA guidelines.

There are two good reasons Governor Brown vetoed it, in defiance of the other advocacy groups that will shriek: The first and most important reason is that most farms are already more strict about antibiotics than FDA guidance is. Most farmers are not using antibiotics without a good reason, just as most doctors are not, and since their own standards are stricter, using the FDA would have been a step backward.

The second reason is cost: We want food to be more affordable, not less, and California SB 835 (titled [Food animals: medically important antimicrobial drugs](#)) required a prescription from a veterinarian to use antibiotics. It's a great subsidy for animal doctors but it would drive up costs for the public substantially, at a time when food production is the only engine of the American economy still running.

What is intriguing for advocates of agriculture is that the NRDC was placed in a position [where they had to recant previous claims about overuse](#). They filed a lawsuit in 2011 claiming that growth promotion antibiotic use was out of control and now they admit it is actually just a tiny percentage.

The opinion that antibiotics are used for something other than medicine is quite widespread. [In an article in The Atlantic earlier this month](#), the first commenter rehashed the myth that antibiotics are used as 'fatteners'. What was the premise of the article? [That the FDA needs to crack down on antibiotics](#) because the developed world has an antibiotic resistance problem. Farms and antibiotics resistance are a spurious correlation. Yes, antibiotic resistance is a problem, but the FDA can't fix that unless they want tearful mothers testifying before Congress that their child was denied antibiotics and suffered because of it.

Antibiotic resistance is happening in large part because doctors over-prescribe them, including for ailments such as acute respiratory infections, where they aren't going to work. A recent paper [even found that doctors were more likely to give an antibiotic in the afternoon than in the morning](#). Good luck finding any farmer who will just feed an antibiotic to a cow because it is close to dinner time.

Antibiotics use *has* gone up, but it isn't due to being inappropriately used for fatter cows, it has gone up 16 percent for the same reasons it has gone up in people – resistance and more desire to get rid of suffering as early as possible. Critics use the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after this therefore because of this) fallacy to claim that the increase is because it has become common for farmers to use antibiotics to *prevent* disease rather than cure it.

National Resources Defense Council is not cheering because a flawed bill was scuttled in the name of reason and evidence; [they are cheering because it means they can still pressure lawmakers to actually force the removal of antibiotics from food animal production](#)

. Food cost is not really an issue if you are a Manhattan lawyer or fundraiser at the NRDC – but for Americans who are not part of the Organic 1 percent the 20 percent losses that will be incurred are going to mean they go without meat.

Governor Brown and the NRDC don't side with agricultural evidence and reason very often, so even if their motivations are wrong, the result is right, and that is to be applauded.

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