Misconceptions about the U.S. chicken meat industry

Myth: Hormones are used to make chickens grow bigger and faster, and therefore chicken meat contains hormones. In some cases these hormones have resulted in the early sexual maturity of girls.

Truth: FALSE

**NO HORMONES ARE LEGAL  NO HORMONES ARE FED**

The fast growth of today’s broiler chicken is due to successful breeding programs as well as improvements in poultry nutrition and management. No hormones are fed or otherwise administered to poultry in the U.S.

In part, this myth stems from a television program in July 1985 which stated that hormonal abnormalities in young women in Puerto Rico were linked to the feeding of hormones, specifically oestrogen, to chickens. Without actually saying so, the story implied that feeding oestrogen hormones to chickens was common practice worldwide. The myth is perpetuated by the current labeling of chicken with the statement “raised without hormones”. The hormone-free label can only be used in conjunction with the text “Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones.”

**Myth: Chickens are raised with antibiotics and chicken meat contains harmful concentrations of antibiotic residues.**

**Truth: FALSE**

Antibiotics are frequently used to enhance the health and productivity of broiler flocks. The use of antimicrobials is strictly regulated by the Food and Drug Association (FDA) and the USDA.

Poultry have a very low incidence of residue violations due to the strict control of husbandry and testing practices associated with the integration of the industry. To guard against the possibilities of misuse of antibiotics, by either ignorance or illegal activity, FDA requires the collection and analysis of samples. If a violation occurs (and they are rare in chicken production), corrective action is taken to prevent recurrence.

**Myth: Overuse of antibiotics in food animal production, in this case poultry, will make the antibiotics less effective and could lead to antibiotic-resistance.**

**Truth: UNCLEAR**

The evaluation of the impact of antibiotic use in animal agriculture on antibiotic resistance is complex and subject to speculation and polarization.

Antibiotics have been used in many ways since they were first discovered. The most well know uses are in human and companion animal medicine. Antibiotics are also used in agriculture—both animal and plant production. Antibiotics are used in the commercial production of fruit trees, potatoes, tobacco, ornamental plants and others. They are also used in fish and bee production.

There is ample evidence that the overuse and injudicious use of antimicrobials in human medicine is a major factor in the development of antibiotic resistance.

Because many consumers are worried about the potential for development of antibiotic resistance, many chicken producers are working to find new ways to reduce their use without compromising the quality of their animal care and products.

**Myth: The poultry industry feeds arsenic, poison, resulting in arsenic residues in the chicken we eat.**

**Truth: FALSE**

With headlines like ‘Arsenic’s use in chicken feed troubles health advocates’ (Baltimore Sun, March 10, 2007) and ‘Chicken feed may present arsenic danger’ (Pittsburgh Post Gazette, March 8, 2007) it is not surprising that consumers are confused as to why producers would feed their chickens arsenic, a known poison.

The reality is that the poultry industry uses products which contain arsenic as a part of their chemical makeup and are known as arsenicals. Roxarsone, for example, is added to broiler diets to control coccidiosis and nitrosone is used for the treatment or prevention of blackhead in turkeys. Most of the consumed arsenic is in the organic form and is excreted unchanged in the manure.

While arsenic is often considered a poison it is an essential nutrient and in trace amounts is involved in methionine and amino acid metabolism. Arsenic is a natural metallic element found in low
concentrations everywhere in the environment. Arsenic occurs naturally in the earth’s surface at 1.5 to 2 ppm, mostly in the inorganic form. The arsenic content of soils ranges from 0.2 to 40 ppm. Arsenic is present in soil, water, air, and all living organisms. It is not unexpected, therefore, to find arsenic in foods.

Scientists and environmentalists have indicated that they will continue to evaluate the use of arsenicals in agriculture. With the negative overtones associated with the word arsenic, it is most likely that industry critics will continue to use this issue to attack the poultry industry.

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Quality and freshness are the standard of good chicken, but today’s consumers are overwhelmed by words like antibiotics, hormones, and bird flu.

THE CHICKEN SUPPLY IN THE UNITED STATES REMAINS WHOLESOME AND SAFE.