



To:
Hormel Foods
500 14th Ave NE
Austin, MN 55912

Re: Open Letter to Hormel Foods on its Animal Welfare Claims and How It is Using Antibiotics

World Animal Protection and the undersigned public health, consumer, and environmental organizations are calling on Hormel Foods to take meaningful action for animals and public health by committing to eliminate the use of antibiotics for disease prevention by 2030, covering all farms and animals in its entire supply chain, beginning with a commitment to reduce use by 50% by 2025 from 2010 baseline levels.

As a global company behind brands such as SPAM, Hormel Chili, Jennie-O, and Natural Choice, Hormel has the power and responsibility to effect needed change for a more humane sustainable food system.

Hormel is putting a great deal of fanfare and self-praise into what it has accomplished and plans to accomplish regarding using antibiotics responsibly and protecting the animals in its substantial supply chain. This started in 2018 with Hormel [signing on to a framework for antibiotic stewardship](#).

The importance of addressing routine use of antibiotics and protecting the well-being of farmed animals cannot be overstated. Antibiotics are a band-aid to manage intensive conditions that impede animal health and increase susceptibility to disease, such as overcrowding, removing young animals from their mothers too early, or painful physical mutilations (e.g., cutting piglets' tails). This overuse of antibiotics contributes to the rapid rise and spread of bacteria that are resistant to medicines used to fight infections in humans. Resistant bacteria are carried off farms via water, air, workers, insects, wildlife, and animal products, reaching humans and causing life-threatening illnesses that no longer respond when treated with antibiotics. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [more than 2.8 million people](#) develop an antibiotic-resistant infection each year. In more than 600,000 of those cases, the illness was farm and food borne.

Restricting antibiotics to the treatment of sick animals when diagnosed by a veterinarian is imperative to curb the global health crisis resulting from current use patterns. This requires adopting on-farm practices that align with the Five Domains and prevent disease by ensuring animals have sufficient space, enriched living environments, and the ability to exhibit their natural behaviors, growth, and development.

Our analysis of Hormel's current activities and claims regarding use of antibiotics in the company's supply chain do not sufficiently address the overuse of antibiotics rampant in factory farms. The company appears to be taking advantage of vague language and framing incremental efforts as transformational change.

Hormel must set a firm, timebound commitment to eliminate antibiotic use for disease prevention:

In May of 2022, Hormel published its 2nd [Antibiotic Stewardship Report](#), emphasizing that it is "striving" to reduce and eliminate the use of medically important antibiotics, particularly for turkey farms supplying its Jennie-O brand, which is [only a fraction](#) of its business. Many advocates have taken note of Hormel's use of the word "striving" regarding its efforts to end the use of medically important antibiotics for disease prevention. Using words like "strive" or "aim" or "encourage" means the company is avoiding being accountable for failing to make any real progress. The company must set a clear, timebound commitment by which it will eliminate the use of antibiotics for disease prevention.

Hormel must go beyond current FDA regulations:

Hormel stresses that it never uses medically important antibiotics for growth promotion. In reality, this is just compliant with FDA's [regulation in 2017](#) that stated, "antibiotics that are important for human medicine can no longer be used for growth promotion or feed efficiency in cows, pigs, chickens, turkeys, and other food animals." These new rules, imposed on the pharmaceutical companies that manufacture and market antimicrobials for farmed animals, are likely behind the decreased use documented on select farms in 2017, not any actions by the company itself.

Hormel must report current antibiotic use by all farms:

The May 2022 report provides data from some of the company's supplying farms on the amount of antibiotics used quarterly from 2015-2020. Overall, its reporting barely covers the millions of animals in its supply chain. Reporting for turkeys only covered company-owned farms and contract suppliers, leaving out the 25% of turkeys who fit neither category. For pigs, the sales data were only for the company-owned sow farm and an unspecified proportion of contract growers. All of Hormel's pigs raised for food are grown by contract farmers for a portion of their lives, so a significant chunk of reporting is missing. Hormel has indicated that it will cover more farms in future reporting, but still only some of its total contract pig farms.

Hormel must reduce antibiotic use for *all animals* supplying the company:

Similarly, Hormel's commitments to stop routine use of antibiotics are only for a limited part of its turkey supply and only a limited part of the life of some of its pigs. The company has not provided information on where its pigs are raised and how many animals it buys on the open market, meaning we cannot at this time know how many animals are being missed by its current commitments.

Hormel must reduce use of *all antibiotics*:

Addressing routine use of medically important antibiotics is a critical first step, but many antibiotics not currently defined as medically important are also used to prevent disease in factory farming conditions. Their continued use could contribute to rising resistance, not to mention prop up the status quo and hinder advancing animal welfare. Hormel has stated that it will “look for an opportunity to pilot the Certified Responsible Antibiotic Use (CRAU) Pork Standard with a partner supplier from wean to finish,” but this is not a clear commitment to end use for disease prevention or promote animal welfare.

Sharing information on specific welfare practices:

Hormel’s [updated stewardship principles](#) also refer to providing a balanced and nutritious diet, water, and a “safe and humane environment...including minimizing stress [and] managing social needs. Minimizing stress, managing social needs, and providing nutritious diets are important aspects of ensuring animals’ welfare can be better protected, but specifics matter. It is important that Hormel is transparent about the management strategies it is putting into practice to achieve these goals and for it to set further goals to improve welfare, such as reducing crowding, providing bedding and enrichments, and ending painful mutilations.

It seems clear that Hormel is avoiding a clearly defined commitment to eliminate the use of even medically important antibiotics for disease prevention. This type of vague language is indicative of the “greenwashing” or “humane-washing” common among large-scale meat producers, relying on bare minimum accomplishments as being industry-leading standards. Detailed policy commitments to eliminate the use of medically important antibiotics for disease prevention across all farms supplying Hormel’s brands and transparent reporting on their annual use will aid in reducing resistant pathogens and protecting farmed animals. Hormel has the power to be a global influencer in policy change for antibiotic use in this industry and be a leader among its peers in transitioning to a more humane and sustainable food system.

Sincerely,

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