

Important Information Your Cardiologist May Not Know

Blog post by guest blogger, Sarah Marketon. Sarah is the Director of Communications at Wisconsin Farm Bureau.

Our bodies and our health are very important. We often associate the food we put into our bodies as being one avenue toward a healthier self. Most of us have a good grasp around the fact that eating a bag of potato chips is unhealthy, but choosing to snack on some veggies may be a more healthful choice. As more and more people are becoming interested in healthy foods, they are also becoming further removed from the source of their food – *farmers*.

Medical Trusted Sources

Let's talk farming for a minute. When farmers have livestock that is not feeling well and need medical attention, they turn to their veterinarian. Veterinarians are a trusted source of information regarding animal health because they have an advanced degree in that line of study. Farmers rely on them to not only make animals healthy after they are sick, but to follow preventative measures that reduce the likelihood of an animal falling ill. Similarly, humans turn to medical doctors as a trusted source of information on getting healthy and staying that way. But what happens when a trusted source of medical information is misinformed him/herself?

I sat down one Friday night with my parents' copy of The Reader's Digest thumbing through the pages looking for a good laugh. In full disclosure, I will admit even though the magazine has a stereotype in our household for being an "old person's" magazine, I still enjoy reading some of the stories or at least getting a good laugh from some of the crazy things people encounter. This particular issue had a story titled, "How Cardiologists Protect Their Heart" so I flip to that section, interested in learning a thing or two from people I would consider heart health professionals. When I read number 13 however, I was a little disgruntled. Here is what it said,

"Since the heart is a muscle, it needs daily lean proteins. I eat grass-fed meat and wild-caught fish along with heart-healthy olive oil, nuts and vegetables. And I make sure to avoid meat that contains antibiotics or hormones."

Let me break this statement down into pieces so we can evaluate the truth being how food is grown and raised.

Antibiotics in Meat

Did you know all meat is antibiotic free? That's right, every package of meat you buy at the grocery store is free of antibiotics. At all USDA inspected meat processing facilities, there are Food

Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspectors who take meat samples and test them for antibiotic residue. After the test comes back negative, the rest of the meat from that animal is allowed to enter into the food chain. This testing is done early in the meat processing plant so if there are issues with the meat, it can be disposed of with no worries of it entering the food system.

So, how can farmers use antibiotics yet have meat from animals that is antibiotic free? From time to time, animals become sick no matter how many preventative measures a farmer follows. When this happens, administering antibiotics to make the animal better is the right thing to do ethically and morally. The Food and Drug Administration has established withdrawal periods for each type of medication (even vaccines) used in food animals. This withdrawal time is determined by looking at how long it takes that medication to be completely broken down inside the animal's body and no longer present in the meat.

Strictly following withdrawal times is something farmers take very seriously because it is illegal to send an animal to market knowing that a withdrawal time hasn't completely elapsed. Each farm's animals are uniquely identified at the processing plant, so if those animals test positive for antibiotic residue, they can be traced back to the farm and there will be large fines and/or other serious punishment. After raising pigs, myself and working on a pig farm, I can testify to the fact that record keeping is vitally important and each employee on the farm is trained to properly record all medication that is administered. Farmers work closely with their veterinarian to determine the correct medication and correct dosage for sick animals.

Hormones in Meat

Here is a fun fact for you, *all meat has hormones!* That's right, just like humans, animals naturally have hormones in their bodies and that means they are present in meat as well. Does that mean you shouldn't eat meat? Absolutely not, there are hormones in other foods as well such as cabbage, peas, soy milk and potatoes. They are natural!

What most people are probably concerned about, however, is farmers administering additional hormones. Administering additional hormones is illegal in pigs and chickens. In fact, if there is a "no hormones added" label on a package of pork and poultry it must also contain the statement, "Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones". Simply put, don't fall for fear based marketing. Outsmart those marketers.

Administering additional hormones is legal, however, in beef. If a beef farmer chooses to use a hormone implant, it is only administered one time to that animal. They do not receive multiple implants or multiple doses. The end result is a beef product only slightly higher in estrogen than non-implanted beef – 1.9 nanograms vs. 1.3 nanograms respectively. This seems like a pretty low number when compared with cabbage (11,000 nanograms), soy milk (11,250 nanograms) or a birth

control pill (35,000 nanograms). So long story short, if you avoid implanted beef because you are worried about the hormones, there is no need to worry! Just one more way for you to outsmart those marketers who try to sell product based on some consumers' lack of knowledge.

Food Choice

I am an advocate of food choice, more specifically I am an advocate of food choice as long as that choice is based on fact not fear. This particular cardiologist said he chooses grass-fed meat. I am ok with that food choice and I am ok with farmers having that niche market to sell product. What I am not ok with is that it seems this gentleman doesn't understand the differences between grain-fed and grass-fed beef. What I have discovered while doing some research is that all beef is grass-fed as the cattle spend a majority of their lives on pasture, but beef can either be grain-finished or grass-finished. That means that during the final stages of growing they can be supplemented grain along with hay and other forages (grain-finished) or eat only grass (grass-finished). If you want to learn more, visit www.factsaboutbeef.com. I am not a beef expert so I had to reach out to a few beef farmer friends to ask some questions. I encourage you to ask a farmer your questions so you can get a factual answer to aid in your food purchasing decisions.

Additional information:

[Don't Pay Extra for the "Raised Without Hormones" Turkey!](#)

[What You Need To Know About Antibiotic Usage in Livestock](#)

[What's On That Meat Label?](#)

Sources:

- https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/food-labeling/meat-and-poultry-labeling-terms/meat-and-poultry-labeling-terms!/ut/p/a1/jZFRb4lwEMc_DY-lx3AG90ZIFmUTZsxm5WUpehSS0pK2jrhPP9wyExed9p569_vn7v5HC8poothHl7hrtOLy8C_G77CAcTBJIM0nwSPMsrdF_pQkEC3vB2D9D5CFN-ovvBi_u6dMbGtyZeTIXtOi4q0mjKk2ZQEe4sj0aS1ml9ZZYXqHbk4pvHLE1ovstSF6ibJSgrEV-UG1Jp3fSmf2xRBya1I4HVrQ4HReCIWZZuBxN0yyEfPQXOOPnD3DZsMERIXX5fbx1rMowGIY3WKFB4-MkK6d6-yDBx70fe8LrYVEf6NbD85Jam0dZack7dpX9vkcT6F5aVeRjb8Ay-NIYw!!/#17
- <http://www.explorebeef.org/beefchoices.aspx>
- http://www.beefboard.org/news/files/CIOTC/ChoicesofBeef_Final_web.pdf
- <http://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/beef/2846/15997>

