



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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I have commented on Panera and particularly Chipotle's over the fear mongering they are using as a marketing tool to further their business at the expense of our farmers and in particular our livestock producers. Now we have another fast food restaurant that has joined this despicable attempt to placate the ideology driven activist groups by joining in on this fray. It seems that Subway, the world's largest fast food chain, recently announced a detailed plan to eliminate antibiotics use in all of its U.S. meat supplies. Subway's official press release notes that it pledged to remove artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives by 2017. But what caught my eye is that Subway plans to begin serving meat that has never received antibiotics – poultry in 2016, pork and beef six years after that is complete. Did you catch that? Let me repeat – “meat from animals that have NEVER received antibiotics in its lifetime!” You have to be kidding me! Do they even have a clue?

Subway said its announcement that this was the "culmination of several months of intensive work with suppliers" and that it is proud to finally be in a position to share its plans. Yeah right! Give me a break! Try to find any livestock producer who will verify that they were consulted. Subway said the decision was not a reaction to any campaign, and that it continually works on improving its menu. Oh really? Well, I call that this statement a big pile of male bovine excrement!!

In reality the announcement comes after this coalition of activist groups launched a campaign targeted at the sandwich giant this summer. These groups as a part included: Natural Resources Defense Council, Friends of the Earth, Center for Food Safety, U.S. Public Interest Research Group (Ralph Nader group), and food blogger Vani Hari (The infamous “Food Babe”). They have campaigned to get Subway to commit to buying meat produced without the routine use of antibiotics, and provide a timeline for doing so. Interesting enough the activist organizations timed their pressure on Subway with their 50th anniversary. These activist groups recently notified the company that they would be delivering nearly 300,000 petitions to its headquarters later this month, calling for action on antibiotics. Subway took the easy way out. What is sad is that by committing to eliminate antibiotic use in chicken, turkey, pork and beef, the company has gone beyond McDonald's commitment earlier this year. There was no consultation with producers or animal scientists. They just buckled to bullies!

I believe that this sandwich chain also makes the move to compete with its rivals and have in reality have given in to pressure from these activist groups, following recent events that have dampened their efforts to retain an image of “Fresh Food”, which had become their moniker. These activist groups have constantly stated that they believe that ending the routine use of antibiotics in livestock will stop the growth of drug-resistant superbugs. Although a link between agriculture and drug-resistant superbugs has not been proven, these activist groups and others have targeted agriculture rather than focusing on the proven link between health care and the misuse of antibiotics by humans or actually studying animal drugs.

It is as well known fact that many people don't take an antibiotic for the recommended period of time, which can make that same antibiotic less effective the next time it's needed. It is the same effect that farmers have seen with pesticide resistant weeds. I would suggest reading the information at: <http://www.mnfarmliving.com/2015/03/what-you-really-need-to-know-about-antibiotics-in-livestock.html>. Ryan Goodman has stated it well in his blog: “Subway emphasized sourcing meat that has never received antibiotics. As posted on the Subway Facebook page, “We're always working to make our products even better. That's why we're transitioning to serve only meats that have never received antibiotics starting in 2016.” This is dangerous. Antibiotics are important tools to treat disease. Most activist complaints focus on the use of antibiotics in feedlots, but most fail to acknowledge their importance in treating illnesses. This includes treating cattle in pasture and range situations, where activists claim they want livestock to be raised. Removing this tool from livestock farming and ranching families, with the guidance of veterinarians, is dangerous to our ability to continue raising healthy animals.” I full heartedly agree with Ryan's assessment. Please go to: <http://agricultureproud.com/2015/10/20/subway-removing-antibiotics-and-facebook-comments/>. I do wish that Subway would have consulted animal scientists and had actually worked with producers before they made this knee-jerk reaction that has far-reaching consequences.

Subway is not only trying to be like Chipotle and Panera when it comes to selling fast-food, but the world's largest restaurant chain is also resorting to similar social media tactics. I know that several individuals; including ag bloggers and even myself, have posted on Facebook and on their website in regards to this egregious move, only to have our comments deleted. There is a name for businesses or people who do this sort of thing, but I can't use that in print. I will let you make your own mind up. What are they afraid of? Perhaps the truth? Even if they do know the truth they are taking the low road!

Of course these activist groups are touting Subway's position as “a victory for public health.” While the spokesperson said Subway should be “commended for answering its customers' calls,” I will guarantee you that the pressure did not come from customers. The pressure came from these fear-mongering activist groups, and Subway – like many others – complied to avoid the potential for negative publicity that is easily created by these groups. They caved rather than take the honest and science based route. While changes will take place over the next 10 years, it remains unseen if those “changes” have holes like Subway's Swiss cheese, and how the marketing that surrounds the claims is framed. For now I am adding Subway to the list that contains Panera and Chipotle's that I will not reward with my fast food dollar. No foot-long for me!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or UNL Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, UNL Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>