

News: For Immediate Release

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MARYLAND BANS ARSENIC IN CHICKEN FEED, HEALTH CARE INSTRUMENTAL IN PASSING LEGISLATION

BALTIMORE, April 12, 2012 - The collective voice of the health care and public health communities helped tip the scales in a long-running legislative battle that culminated last Saturday in MD becoming the first state in the country to adopt a ban on arsenic additives in chicken feed.

This was the third consecutive year that the state legislature considered the arsenic ban in MD, which is the nation's 8th-largest producer of broiler chickens. "The letters, calls and testimonies we received from hospitals, health care and public health professionals and their associations played an important role in helping to pass this bill," said State Delegate Tom Hucker (D-Montgomery), the primary sponsor and champion of the legislation.

The American Academy of Pediatrics-MD Chapter, Baltimore Medical System, Carroll Hospital Center, Health Care Without Harm, MD Dietetic Association, MD Nurses Association, MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society and Union Hospital of Cecil County all publicly supported the arsenic ban. Inorganic arsenic, which is a known human carcinogen, has been found in increased levels in soil where poultry litter has been used as fertilizer, and in chickens that have been fed arsenic additives.

"There are large-scale poultry producers in MD and elsewhere that have already stopped using these arsenic additives, so we know that this can be done safely and successfully," said Jeff Kaplan, M.D., MPH, Chair of MedChi Public Health Committee and Medical Advisor of Health Care Without Harm. "Preventing exposures to known carcinogens is always the first choice. It's just common sense, especially when safer, alternative practices exist," said Dr. Kaplan.

In October 2011, Alpharma, a subsidiary of drug-company Pfizer, Inc., voluntarily suspended the sale of Roxarsone, the most common arsenic additive, after an FDA study showed higher levels of inorganic arsenic in the livers of chickens fed arsenic additives as compared to the control group. "While this was an important first step, it was not a mandatory ban," said Jorge Aguilar, Southern Region Director of Food and Water Watch, the non-profit watch-dog group that coordinated the support for the legislation in MD. "Citizens and public health officials shouldn't have to fight so hard to remove a known carcinogen. In fact, a few last minute changes to the MD arsenic law opened loopholes to reintroduce arsenic in the future. It shouldn't be up to corporations to decide if arsenic should be used in food production," explained Aguilar.

The MD ban coincides with the recent launch of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative, a campaign to engage hospitals throughout the country in improving patient and community health through environmentally responsible purchases and practices, including healthier, sustainably-produced foods. Thanks to the existing work of the Healthy Food in Health Care program, over 375 hospitals around the country have already signed a pledge to provide healthier, local and sustainable foods at their facilities.

"While this new MD law is another significant step forward, a nationwide ban on the use of arsenic additives in poultry feed is what's needed to fully protect public health," said Michelle Gottlieb, national co-coordinator of the Healthy Food in Health Care Program of Health Care Without Harm.

"A nationwide ban would also make poultry produced without these harmful additives readily available to hospital food service, and to all institutions and consumers," said Gottlieb.

For more information:

Citizen Petition Seeking Withdrawal of Approval of Roxarsone and Certain Other Arsenical Additives in Animal Feed.

Submitted by the Center for Food Safety and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy to the FDA on December 8, 2009.

www.healthobservatory.org/library.cfm?refid=107024.

Feeding Arsenic to Poultry: Is this Good Medicine?

By Health Care Without Harm, written by David Wallinga, MD, Director, Food and Health Program, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

http://noharm.org/lib/downloads/food/Feeding_Arsenic_to_Poultry.pdf.

Poison-Free Poultry in Maryland – Factsheet.

By Food & Water Watch.

www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/foodsafety/poison-free-poultry-in-maryland.

The Healthy Food in Health Care program engages hospitals and other health care facilities, through advocacy and education, in implementing programs that explicitly connect all aspects of the food system with health. The program catalyzes sustainable procurement efforts, creates clinician advocates, and inspires health care institutions to become leaders in shaping a food system that supports prevention-based health care. For more information, visit www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org.

The Healthier Hospitals Initiative is a call-to-action for healthcare organizations across the country to join the shift to a more sustainable business model, and a challenge to address the health and environmental impacts of the health care industry. For more information, visit www.healthierhospitals.org.

Health Care Without Harm is an international coalition of more than 500 organizations in 53 countries, working to transform the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment. For more information, visit www.noharm.org.

About MedChi

MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. It is the largest physician organization in Maryland. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland's foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit www.medchi.org.