

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release—October 30, 2010 Contact person: Bob Lewis 301-862-3517

Prohibit Arsenic in Chicken Feed—Health Hazard Unnecessary

OCTOBER 30, 2010—For more than 60 years, chicken factory farms on Maryland's Eastern Shore have been using arsenic in their chicken feed as a growth promoter. Arsenic is a known carcinogen and is more commonly used in rat poison. Studies indicate that detectable traces of arsenic are present in the chicken we eat. Nearly 100 percent of chicken menu items in fast food restaurants and 74 percent of the chicken we buy in grocery stores contain traces of arsenic.



Public health problems linked to chronic exposure to this toxin include lung and kidney cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and neurological disorders in children. Waste from these factory farms also contains arsenic. As this waste is stockpiled and applied to farm fields, arsenic and nutrient-laden runoff threatens our rivers, fisheries, and water-based recreational activities. Additionally, leachate from stockpiles and arsenic-bearing agricultural runoff infiltrate into the ground and posed a threat to drinking water supplies. Already some areas of the eastern shore have drinking water supplies that contain high levels of arsenic, although the source of the arsenic is inconclusive with industry claiming the arsenic is “naturally occurring.”

Ongoing human and environmental exposure to low levels—levels approved by the EPA and FDA—of arsenic have not been studied extensively. Human tolerance to arsenic combined with other carcinogens has not been studied enough either. Accumulation of arsenic in ground water used for drinking water is also a threat that merits more study. An analysis of eastern shore tap water found higher levels of arsenic where chicken litter is spread on fields than where it is not.

The chicken industry has alternatives to arsenic in chicken feed. Much of the arsenic use is based on the problems associated with confined animal feeding operations where tens of thousands of individual birds are packed into small buildings. Illnesses can spread quickly and growth rates are slowed. Industry claims that arsenic provides the safest and most effective way of controlling illness.

The European Union banned arsenic in chicken feed over 10 years ago.

The St. Mary's River Watershed Association joins with Food and Water Watch and hundreds of other advocacy groups in calling for the cessation on arsenic use in chicken feed. We are working on a statewide campaign to pass a bill in the 2011 legislative session to do just this—ban arsenic from chicken feed. Maryland state representatives need to recognize that there is broad public support for this issue. In Southern Maryland, we are asking Senator Roy Dyson and Delegates Anthony O'Donnell, John Bohanan, and John Wood to stand up for Maryland's public health and environment. For more information on how you can help, log onto: www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/foodsafety/act-now-for-poison-free-poultry-in-md/ or contact Shelley Aling at shelley@greencorps.org.

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