



Readers' views for May 7, 2010

Better safe than sorry on hormone

Oregon State University's Mike Gamroth remarked that the public's negative reaction to recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH or rBST) is "totally out of bounds." With all due respect to Gamroth's substantial contributions to Oregon's dairy industry, we disagree.

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility has intensively studied the scientific data on rBGH for the last seven years. Our nationwide advisers include physicians, scientists, veterinarians, dairy processors, retailers, public health advocates and numerous dairy farmers. Based on our research and their work, we strongly oppose this hormone based on animal and human health concerns.

Specifically, rBGH increases 16 harmful medical conditions in cows, which even the FDA acknowledges. Both Canada and the European Union cited harm to animals as the official reason they've banned its use. The USDA found that animal health was a major concern "specifically identified in all regions" as a reason so many farmers had stopped using the drug.

One problem is mastitis, requiring more antibiotic use, which contributes to increasing antibiotic resistance in humans, a major, costly public health problem. Furthermore, significant scientific data suggest that rBGH may contribute to human cancers.

In the past few years, the American Public Health Association, American Nurses Association, and Health Care Without Harm, a coalition of over 460 organizations promoting safe and healthy practices in hospitals, have formally opposed it. While the American Medical Association doesn't have an official stance, its past president advised all AMA members in 2008 to serve only rBGH-free milk in hospitals.

Our advice is simple: Better safe than sorry. This hormone is an unnecessary risk to our health, and the more consumers learn about it, the more they avoid it. As such, consumer demand has led many local and national companies producing dairy products to go completely or partially rBGH-free, as have many restaurants and all four major Portland hospital systems.

We're happy to present a program on rBGH at no cost for any group. For more information, including scientific data, see our website at www.oregonpsr.org

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