

## FIGHTING SUPERBUGS

For more than 30 years, doctors have used the antibiotic vancomycin when all others have failed. Now vancomycin itself is starting to fail. More than half the strains of *Enterococcus faecium*, a bacterium that causes infections after surgery, are resistant to it.



Memo From MFJ

Enter Synercid, a new antibiotic that was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in September. In about half the cases, Synercid works when other antibiotics—including vancomycin—don't.

But bacteria have already started to become immune to Synercid.

Part of the problem is that a close cousin of Synercid, virginiamycin, has been routinely fed to poultry (to speed growth) for over a decade. That might explain why bacteria are starting to become resistant to Synercid.

Photo: Robin Capola

To keep that from happening, you can urge the government to:

- Prohibit livestock producers from routinely adding medically important antibiotics to animal feed to promote growth.

*Write to:* FDA Commissioner Jane E. Henney, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, Maryland 20857 (hamric@oc.fda.gov).

- Not let U.S. trade policy endanger the public's health. The European Union has sensibly banned antibiotics used by humans from animal feed, a decision supported by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization. The Clinton Administration, in a misguided effort to protect U.S. meatpackers and drug companies, is protesting that decision. *Write to:* U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky, 600 17th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20508.

*Mike Jacobson*

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