



No thanks for toxic turkeys

New legislation would ban the use of a carcinogenic medicine given to turkeys and other livestock.

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BeyondWonderful

Just in time for the holidays, Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) recently announced legislation that would keep arsenic out of livestock such as turkeys and other farm animals.

The proposed legislation, dubbed the Poison Free Poultry Act or H.R.3624, bans the use of an arsenic-containing antimicrobial drug known as roxarsone, which is commonly added to chicken and poultry feed to make animals grow faster, improve their pigmentation and to combat intestinal parasites.

“Nobody should have to wonder if their Thanksgiving turkey is secretly carrying a carcinogen,” said Israel in a press release on his Web site. “Roxarsone is an unnecessary and dangerous arsenical that we don’t need in our food and that we don’t want in our food. It’s time we stop big factory farms from trying to make their chicken pink by exposing us all to a toxin.”

And it's not just Israel who is upset about toxic turkeys on American dinner plates.

Among many other researchers, Dr. Kieve Nachman, science director at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future and a leading researcher on arsenic in the food supply, is also opposed to the practice.

"Studies have shown that some of the arsenic fed to chickens remains in the edible portions of the birds," she said. "Arsenic has also been found in poultry waste, where it poses environmental and human health risks when the waste is managed, often by spreading on agricultural fields as fertilizer for food crops."

Though the FDA is in charge of regulating the amount of animal drug residues that are allowed, the established levels for acceptable amounts of arsenic in edible animal tissue are more than three decades old, according to the congressman's press release. Since then, much more current research on arsenic has linked its exposure to cancer, diabetes and other health problems.

To get an idea of how many scientists and researchers think that putting arsenic in animal feed is a bad idea, here's a list of just some of the organizations that have endorsed Israel's legislation:

Union of Concerned Scientists, The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, The Humane Society of the United States, The Clean Water Network, Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition, Food & Water Watch, Waterkeeper Alliance, Illinois Citizens for Clean Air & Water, The Organic Consumers Association, Friends of the Earth, The Center for Food Safety, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Sierra Club, The Center for Biological Diversity and Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.

To pass on the side of arsenic this holiday season, buy USDA-certified organic meat, which is free of all antimicrobial drugs, including roxarsone. Or, buy your turkey from a local farmer who doesn't use drugs such as roxarsone on his/her animals. And if you don't know whether that's the case, just ask!