Groups sue US over antibiotics in farm feed

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A coalition of consumer groups filed a federal lawsuit Wednesday against the US Food and Drug Administration over the use of human antibiotics in animal feed, saying it creates dangerous superbugs.

The suit alleges that the regulatory agency concluded in 1977 that the practice of feeding healthy animals low doses of penicillin and tetracycline could lead to the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in people.

"However, despite this conclusion and laws requiring that the agency act on its findings, FDA failed to take any action to protect human health," the groups said in a statement.

The lawsuit aims to "compel FDA to take action on the agency's own safety findings, withdrawing approval for most non-therapeutic uses of penicillin and tetracyclines in animal feed."

Groups included in the filing include the Natural Resources Defense Council, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Food Animal Concerns Trust, Public Citizen, and Union of Concerned Scientists.

The drugs are added to feed or mixed into water given to cows, turkeys, chickens, pigs and other livestock.

However, they are administered at such low levels that they do not treat disease, but leave surviving bacteria stronger and more able to resist them.

"Accumulating evidence shows that antibiotics are becoming less effective, while our grocery store meat is increasingly laden with drug-resistant bacteria," said Peter Lehner, NRDC executive director.

FDA did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

Last year, the FDA authorities pressed farmers to give fewer antibiotics to livestock and poultry to reduce the risk of potentially harmful resistance to antimicrobial drugs.

Yet FDA officials stressed the drugs could play a key role when used properly.

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