Research shows 'raised without antibiotics' label claim in beef cattle lacks integrity
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Many consumers choose higher-priced steaks, burgers and other beef products from cattle that have been raised without antibiotics. The USDA approves meat labels with claims such as 'No Antibiotics Ever', 'No Added Antibiotics' and 'Raised without Antibiotics', but how confident can shoppers be that they are, in fact, getting what they paid for?

Not very, according to a new study published today in *Science*. Credit: GW

The research team found that there are strong incentives to cheat on a set of claims that are relatively easy to confirm. While USDA approval gives these labels credibility and value in the marketplace, the agency does not mandate empirical testing to validate them. "The USDA, retailers and restaurants have the tools to ensure the integrity of these important labels. Consumers are paying real money for these claims, they should get what they pay for." Lo said.

‘Raised without Antibiotics’ production is a market-based solution to a serious public health issue, but the system only works if labels are verified. The authors recommend that the USDA and retailers strengthen verification and enforcement. "Growing demand for ‘Raised without Antibiotics’ meats and poultry has the potential to curb antibiotic use in food-animal production," Price said, "Until either the USDA acts to rigorously verify these claims or retailers eliminate their safe harbor of ignorance, consumers should not rely on the accuracy of these labels. My hope is that consumers and advocacy groups will pressure the USDA to reform these..."
important label claims."

The study, "Policy reforms for antibiotic use claims in livestock," was published online April 7 in the journal Science.


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