Court Reverses Ruling On Public Hearings About Antibiotics in Livestock Feed

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration isn't required to hold public hearings to evaluate the health risks of widespread use of antibiotics in animal feed, a federal appeals court ruled Thursday.

The decision by the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a ruling in 2012 by a district court that sided with several health and consumer organizations that sued the FDA after the agency decided against holding the hearings.

The health groups want the FDA to withdraw approval of using penicillin and tetracycline in animal feed to make cattle and other livestock grow faster. They say the practice has been linked to an increase to human resistance to antibiotics, while industry groups argue the issue needs more study.

The appeals court found that the FDA isn't required to hold the hearings because it's made no official finding that the antibiotics pose a health risk.

The agency claims it has addressed the situation by initiating a voluntary program that encourages the industry to use the drugs "judiciously," saying public hearings consume too much time and resources.

Jennifer Sorenson, a lawyer for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said in a statement that the plaintiffs are considering other legal options.

The appeals court ruling "gives a free pass to ignore science when it is politically inconvenient," she said.

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