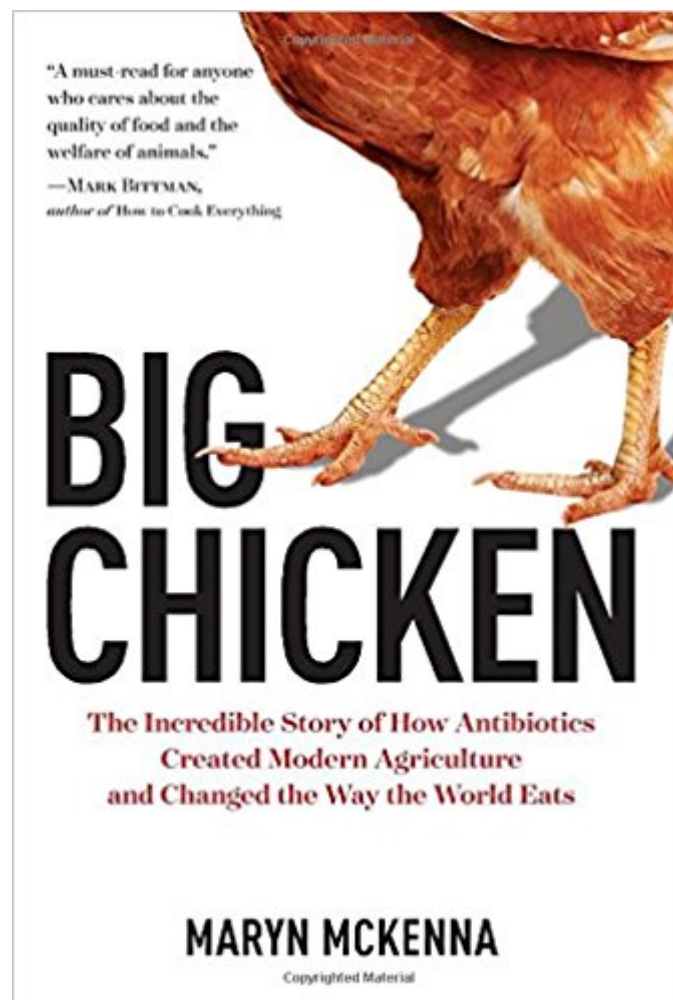




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Big Chicken: The Incredible Story Of How Antibiotics Created Modern Agriculture And Changed The Way The World Eats



Synopsis

In this eye-opening exposé, acclaimed health journalist and National Geographic contributor Maryn McKenna documents how antibiotics transformed chicken from local delicacy to industrial commodity—and human health threat—uncovering the ways we can make America's favorite meat safer again. What you eat matters—for your health, for the environment, and for future generations. In this riveting investigative narrative, McKenna dives deep into the world of modern agriculture by way of chicken: from the farm where it's raised directly to your dinner table. Consumed more than any other meat in the United States, chicken is emblematic of today's mass food-processing practices and their profound influence on our lives and health. Tracing its meteoric rise from scarce treat to ubiquitous global commodity, McKenna reveals the astounding role of antibiotics in industrial farming, documenting how and why "wonder drugs" revolutionized the way the world eats—and not necessarily for the better. Rich with scientific, historical, and cultural insights, this spellbinding cautionary tale shines a light on one of America's favorite foods—and shows us the way to safer, healthier eating for ourselves and our children.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“This superb scientific exposé by journalist Maryn McKenna skewers the use of growth-promoting antibiotics in chicken feed. Nature “Solid, eye-opening public health journalism. Kirkus “In Big Chicken, McKenna chronicles in exquisite detail how humanity went from developing antibiotics to prevent the world’s worst bacteria, to standing on the verge of an onslaught of unstoppable

diseases. www.pbs.org “Maryn McKenna has led the charge against rampant antibiotic use and the resultant superbugs. Here, in a page-turning story, she tells how chicken became the symbol of factory farming, and why we can finally be hopeful this dreadful era is drawing to a close. A must-read for anyone who cares about the quality of food and the welfare of animals.”

• Mark Bittman, author of *How to Cook Everything* “Big Chicken is a fascinating story of big food and the price we pay for cheap food.”

• Tom Colicchio, Chef of Crafted Hospitality and Co-founder of Food Policy Action “If you think raising farm animals on antibiotics is nothing to worry about, Big Chicken will change your mind in a hurry. McKenna, a compelling writer, tells a gripping story: how antibiotics helped transform chicken-raising from backyard to industrial. Her account of the profit-driven politics that allowed widespread antibiotic resistance should be required reading for anyone who cares about food and health, and especially for congressional representatives who have consistently failed to take action on this critical issue.”

• Marion Nestle, professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University, and author of *Food Politics* “A modern Upton Sinclair, Maryn McKenna explains how our food is actually produced today. Big Chicken is highly readable, shocking, and opens our eyes to the risks we have been incurring. A most important book!”

• Martin Blaser, MD, author of *Missing Microbes*, Professor of Medicine and Microbiology at New York University “Always curious, never pedantic, Maryn McKenna shows empathy for man and sympathy for fowl, while giving voice to scientists and farmers who have concluded that antibiotic-drugged chickens imperil the American diet. Big Chicken is beautifully written, rendering her research and the agitations of reformers all that more persuasive.”

• John T. Edge, author of *The Potlikker Papers* “You will never look at BBQ chicken wings or buckets of nuggets the same way again after you read Maryn McKenna’s meticulously researched, riveting Big Chicken and you shouldn’t. After all, the only reason that chicken is so darned fat is that it was fed antibiotics every day of its life. Brava, McKenna, for a tour de force of environmental, science and food writing.”

• Laurie Garrett, Pulitzer Prize winning writer and author of *The Coming Plague* “Maryn McKenna’s enthralling book is ostensibly about chicken but is really about us: the foolish choices we have made and the happier, healthier future that awaits us all if we liberate this most American of foods from the drug fix we have imposed on it. Her deep, careful reporting respects every nuance but builds to a clarion call that is as persuasive as it is profound. So let the cry echo throughout the land, from the egg farms of the Delmarva Peninsula to the bistros of San Francisco: Let chicken be chicken again!”

“Dan Fagin, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Toms River*—“This is a warning: Read this book and you will never look at a bucket of fried chicken the same. In this tour de force, investigative journalist Maryn McKenna hunts down the history of antibiotics in the food chain, showing the missteps and collusion that brought us to a worldwide epidemic of antibiotic resistant bacteria that could undermine our most powerful public health tool. Every now and then I read a book that I believe holds the power to radically remake the world for the better.

“*Big Chicken* is just such a book.”—Anna Lappé, author of *Diet of a Hot Planet*—“Maryn McKenna is one of the best journalists in America reporting on public health. In her latest book, *Big Chicken*, she shows how modern chicken production and drug resistant infections are part of the same problem. This important book is a must-read for anyone wanting to understand why our approach to producing food is unsustainable and the changes we must make if we don’t want to return to a pre-antibiotic era. I love chicken

wings but I will never again look at them in the same way.”—Richard E. Besser, M.D., President and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—“Drug-resistant infections are among the greatest challenges of our time, threatening the foundations of modern medicine. Maryn McKenna makes this challenge personal and compelling, illustrating how antibiotic resistance has been developing, why we should care, and what we should all demand if society is to address it.”—Dr. Jeremy Farrar, Director of The Wellcome Trust

“Maryn McKenna is the leading journalist worldwide on antibiotic overuse and resistance, and in *BIG CHICKEN* she tells a crucial part of that story: the vast misuse and overuse of antibiotics in industrial farming. Antibiotic resistance is a global emergency, and agricultural use of antibiotics is a key part of that crisis. This clear, urgent explanation of how we got here and what at risk should be required reading for anyone who wants to see change happen.”—Lance B. Price, Ph.D., Founder and Director of the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center

“Maryn McKenna has told an important and frightening story—and told it well.

As McKenna makes clear, getting antibiotics out of routine chicken production will make our food tastier and safer.”—Thomas R. Frieden, MD, former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—“Agribusiness’s headlong quest to put “a chicken in every pot” has come at a tremendous cost: Feeding modern medicine’s most valuable antibiotics to healthy farm animals has made these wonder drugs impotent, resulting in thousands on once-preventable human deaths each year. Through solid research and compelling narration, McKenna tells the story of how we allowed this to happen and points to ways to stop the unfolding catastrophe—before it’s too late.”—Barry Estabrook, author of *Pig Tales*

“Big Chicken gathers a colorful cast of characters to piece together the history behind our culture’s massive overuse of antibiotics in chicken production, illuminating the unintended consequence of drug resistance around the globe. Through stories of place-based agriculture from France to Georgia, McKenna leads us toward an alternative future of food that relies on farmer knowledge, promotes biodiversity and results in great-tasting, antibiotic-free chicken.”

•Jill Isenbarger, CEO of Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture

“I encourage everyone to read Big Chicken and learn more about where their food comes from, and more importantly, how it is raised. Maryn McKenna’s book offers a persuasive understanding as to why it is imperative to support what is best for the animal, the farmer, public health, the environment, and the customer.”

•Paul Willis, founder of Niman Ranch Pork Company

MARYN MCKENNA is an award-winning journalist and the author of two critically acclaimed books, *Superbug* and *Beating Back the Devil*. She writes for *Wired*, *National Geographic*, *Scientific American*, *Slate*, *Nature*, *The Atlantic*, *the Guardian*, *National Geographic* magazine’s online science salon *Phenomena*, and others, and is a senior fellow of the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University.

This is the story of how an active little backyard bird became a huge industry and America’s favorite dinner. When Thomas Jukes first started adding microdoses of antibiotics to chicken feed in 1948, there didn’t seem to be a downside. The chickens gained weight, and if you supplemented the chickens’ feed with antibiotics, you could breed more chickens in less space, which equaled greater profits. Then someone thought, if tiny bit of antibiotics is good, more must be better. So they added more and more antibiotics. They also discovered if you soaked raw chicken in antibiotics, it would stay fresher longer and could be shipped greater distances. If only the bacteria in the chickens’ guts hadn’t adapted and mutated and become the resistant little superbugs they are today. Right around the time I got this book, I visited a friend who keeps ten chickens. I don’t know what I expected, but they were really delightful little birds. They each had their own personality, some followed my friend around wherever she went and one perched on my back. It made me feel very sad for all the poor chickens kept in little tiny cages, so fat their little legs can’t hold them up. The author does a good job, laying it all out for the layman. I thought it went on a wee bit too long but only in a few places. For the most part, it really is an interesting story. As the author says somewhere, it’s all too easy to eat chicken without worrying about where it came from or what it was exposed to before it was

slaughtered. This book will make you worry about it.

There actually is quite a bit written about the (continuing) overuse of antibiotics in the raising of food animals. Some of this is, unsurprisingly, quite technical. But not all of it is. Both Marian Nestle (Food Safety) and Bee Wilson (Swindled) have written accessible and informative books about food safety and food marketing. Like so many other people who have read about contemporary CAFO practices, I am vegetarian. (Truth in lending here, though: I was vegetarian before I read about modern meat practices.). But, as McKenna makes clear, the people who are put at risk by the heavy and largely unpoliced use of antibiotics in the raising of poultry are not just those who consume animal flesh (or animal products). The continued efficacy of antibiotics is a good (and a need) for all of us, not merely meat-eaters. E. coli and salmonella (e.g.) do not merely afflict--and sicken, and in some cases kill--people who eat animal products. And those with weakened immune systems--the very young, the very old, and the ill--are especially vulnerable. The health and well-being of the population at large depends on the intelligent (and regulated) oversight of the sources and kinds of antibiotic resistance. I give McKenna high marks for making this plain, explaining why, and giving general readers a decent understanding of why and how it is so problematical for us to continue to allow the heavy and widespread use of antibiotics in the raising of chickens. It is helpful, also, to know something of the history of our growing awareness of the problems with heavy antibiotic use in the raising of food animals. What, if anything, can people do to put a brake on these practices? Given the large power of the poultry industry and the farm/food folks, I am skeptical. But--as always--it is better to know than not to know.

We should make a documentary from this book. Chicken farming is a big business, but after I read this book I feel the antibiotic for chicken business is much larger. Do you pour antibiotics to your child's cereal bowl every morning? Or your child gets antibiotics only when they are sick? On the contrary, antibiotics are given to healthy chicken for their entire life. It simply doesn't make sense. The book starts with the early history of small chicken farms in early 1940, and the miraculous introduction of antibiotic that can cure deadly infections. Then the use of antibiotic as growth promoter has become rampant in the farm. As a result, antibiotic resistant bacteria develop and spreads quickly. The American politics in the 70s played an important role in the delay of FDA regulations of antibiotics for chicken. Of course, because the big pharma conglomerates have been pouring money to the US Congress. There is a hope. The uncontrolled use of antibiotics for chicken can be slowed down by creating consumer awareness. The industry will listen when you demand

antibiotic-free chicken.Overall I give 5 star.

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