

EU ethics group advises against cloning animals for food

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In a recent opinion, the European Group on Ethics for science and new technologies did not find any argument to justify the production of food from clones and their offspring. Instead, it recommends promoting public debates on the impact of cloning farm animals on agriculture, the environment and society at large.

Background:

In March 2007, the Commission asked the EU's Food Safety Authority ([EFSA](#) ) for a scientific opinion on the implications of animal cloning on food safety, animal welfare and the environment. In particular, EFSA was asked to determine whether meat and milk from cloned animals are safe to eat.

In parallel, the EU executive also asked the European Group on Ethics for science and new technologies ([EGE](#) ) to give an opinion on the ethics of cloning.

These requests for opinions came shortly after the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) stated in a [draft risk assessment](#) , published on 28 December 2007, that meat and milk products from cloned cattle, pigs and goats were safe for consumption.

Cloning is not a commercial practice in Europe and products from clones are not known to have entered the European food chain as yet. However, according to the [Commission](#)  , products from clones are "on the verge of widespread commercial use" and are "expected to spread within the global food chain before 2010".

The EFSA's [draft opinion](#)  , on the safety of cloning, published on 11 January 2008, states that "it is very unlikely that any difference exists in terms of food safety between food products from clones and their progeny compared with conventionally-bred animals."

The US FDA's [Final Risk Assessment](#) , published on 15 January 2008, concluded that "meat and milk from clones of cattle, swine, and goats, and the offspring of clones from any species traditionally consumed as food, are as safe to eat as food from conventionally bred animals," but did not reach, due to insufficient information, any conclusion on the safety of food from clones of other animal species, such as sheep.

After the FDA final assessment, the US Department of Agriculture still asked American farmers to voluntarily keep their cloned animals off the market. Its stance is backed by the [federation](#)  of the nation's dairy manufacturing and marketing industries and their suppliers, who argue that it would be prudent to wait until all major foreign trading partners have reviewed and approved the same cloning technology in their respective countries and consumers have become comfortable with the idea of buying milk from cloned cows.

In an [Opinion](#)   adopted on 16 January 2008, the European Group on Ethics for science and new technologies ([EGE](#) ) said it "does not see convincing arguments to justify the production of food from clones and their offspring".

The EGE opinion on ethical aspects of animal cloning for food supply states that "considering the current level of suffering and health problems of surrogate dams and animal clones, the EGE has doubts as to whether cloning animals for food supply is ethically justified. Whether this applies also to progeny is open to further scientific research."

If, however, cloned meat and other food products derived from cloned animals were to be introduced into the European market, the EGE argues that:

- The safety of food products for human consumption must be guaranteed;
- the guidance on animal welfare provided by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) must be followed, and;
- EU legislation on the traceability of animals and their food products should be enforced, including traceability of imports and global trade.

In addition, the EGE recommends conducting further studies and analyses on the long-term animal welfare and health implications for clones and their offspring as well as taking proper measures to preserve the genetic heritage of species of farm animal and address intellectual property and product labelling issues.

Furthermore, it recommends promoting public debates "on the impact of farm animal cloning on agriculture and the environment, on the societal impact of increasing meat consumption and rearing bovines, as well as the fair distribution of food resources".

Positions:

The **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)**, commenting the EGE opinion, stated that it "recognises that the issue of animal cloning raises ethical, moral and other societal issues beyond its remit" and said that the opinion of the EGE "complements the ongoing scientific work of EFSA on this issue".

Commenting on the draft EFSA opinion, Connie Tipton, President and CEO of the **International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA)**, said that "clearly the European Community is where the United States was a full year ago with respect to assessing the safety and unintended health and economic effects of animal cloning."

She added that "nothing is more important to milk processors than the trust people have in milk and milk products."

Just days before the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued its final report, which allows milk from cloned cows enter the food supply, the IDFA urged the administration to carefully consider the more than 30,000 comments FDA received regarding its consultation on the issue. The Association is also calling for a thorough dialogue at all levels on animal cloning, "one that

takes into account the unintended negative economic, trade and public health impacts of approving a niche technology too soon," said Tipton.

US Department of Agriculture Under-Secretary Bruce Knight said that his department "has encouraged technology providers to maintain their voluntary moratorium on sending milk and meat from animal clones into the food supply". His comments came despite the nation's Food and Drug Administration officials announcement that food from cloned livestock was safe to eat.

The **IDFA** immediately congratulated Bruce Knight "for his common-sense decision to continue the moratorium on milk from cloned animals" until American consumers get comfortable with the idea of buying milk from cloned cows and gain a better understanding of this new technology.

It also notes that "milk and food from cloned animals have not been approved for consumption in most countries that are importing our products [...] and it would be prudent to wait until all major foreign trading partners have reviewed and approved the same cloning technology in their respective countries."

The **European association of consumer cooperatives (Euro Coop)** calls for more scientific data and further research on cloning but "would not like to see the scientific dimension outweigh the highly political and ethical dimension of the matter" and calls on a "thorough public debate" on the issue.

"Lessons from the past should be heeded. The EU cannot afford to wait until food resulting from cloned animals is on supermarket shelves to start a dialogue with the general public. More than ever, communicating to consumers is key," said Euro Coop's Secretary General, Rodrigo Gouveia.

The **Eurogroup for Animals** believes that cloning for food production is "totally unacceptable on animal welfare and ethical grounds". The group is concerned that a decision on the issue will be taken without real widespread debate and calls on the EU to take into account the EGE opinion's conclusions. The groups also calls on the EU to introduce an immediate ban on the cloning and marketing of animals for food production.