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### Clone Wars

**FDA approval of cloned meat for consumption raises more than a few questions**

By Joy Lanzendorfer

THE Food and Drug Administration may think cloned animals are ready to enter our food supply, but some local ranchers and dairy farmers do not. In fact, they are concerned that this new technology may put our food supply at risk. And once that happens, it's hard to go back.

Last month, the FDA said the meat and milk from cow, pig and goat clones are as safe as any other food. Clones are an exact genetic replica of the donor animal, similar to latter-born identical twins.

Although the FDA is planning to keep track of cloned animals, critics doubt that their system is good enough to keep cloned animals out of organic food. Albert Straus, owner of Marin's Straus Family Creamery, has seen this firsthand with genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In order to be able to call his milk organic, Straus gives his cows organic feed, which cannot contain GMOs. Although the FDA tracks GMOs, Straus decided to test his feed for them anyway. He found that even though the feed was certified organic, 25 percent to 33 percent of it still had traces of GMOs.

Straus felt that the results threatened the integrity of his product. He is concerned that, like GMOs, cloned food will soon proliferate through the food supply and contaminate his cattle.

"I feel like we're all guinea pigs," he says. "A lot of people in the government come from the biotech industry. The FDA is a revolving door for the industry. It's not about human health; it's about where money can be made."

The FDA began its evaluation of cloned meat and dairy in 2001. Its testing was peer-reviewed by independent scientists, and the results were consistent with reports released by the National Academy of Sciences in 2002.

For many, like Matt Byrne, spokesman for the California Cattlemen's Association, that is good enough. "We are content to rely on the experts," he says. "And the FDA is the paramount expert on food safety in the U.S."

Both Byrne and Straus agree that there is little practical use for cloning in ranching and dairy—yet. The technology is too new and expensive to be used in daily operations. "It is very much a fledging technology," Byrne says. "Potentially, there are benefits in selective breeding and genetics, but that is still a ways away. It's a little too early to expect to see it in common use.

"But," he adds, "if the FDA indicates safety of the product, it opens the door for it to be used in commercial use."

### Want Fries With Your Clone?

In testing, the FDA found no evidence that cloned meat or milk increases allergenic risk. They found no new or strange proteins in cloned meat. Rodents that ate cloned food showed no health problems. In short, the FDA found that the food from clones and their progeny was no different from conventional meat and milk.

Therefore, the FDA reasoned that "if an animal is healthy, it will likely produce safe food. ... The existing food inspection methods and standards would effectively prevent the entry of unhealthy clones into the food supply."

But opponents think that the FDA has not done enough testing on food safety. In fact, the FDA did less than a half-dozen tests on food safety on fewer than 40 animals, according to Charles Margulis from Oakland's Center for Environmental Health.



THE NEXT TIME WE MEAT: The FDA says meat from clones is as safe as any other food, but critics say the agency hasn't done nearly enough testing.

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"It's playing Russian roulette with our food," he says. "They are going to trust the food supply of 300 million people to studies done on a couple dozen animals? That's insane."

Clones have a high failure rate, meaning that it takes many tries to get a healthy clone. The host mother suffers through multiple abortions or miscarriages and sometimes gives birth to abnormally large babies. Some clones are born with birth defects and deformities. Others have shortened life-spans.

Naturally, these points have animal-welfare advocates concerned. But it might also affect what we eat; the host mother is often given large quantities of drugs to help her give birth to a healthy clone.

"I don't think the FDA has adequately looked at the fact that humans will be consuming hormones and antibiotics at a higher level, particularly our children," says Rebecca Spector, West Coast director of the Center for Food Safety. "Our children will be drinking that milk."

## Contains Cloned Meat

Sen. Carole Migden, who represents Marin and parts of Sonoma County and San Francisco, has reintroduced a bill to the California state Senate that will require labeling of cloned meats and dairy on packaging. The bill would let consumers know if they are eating food from cloned animals.

This is the second time Migden's bill has gone through the Legislature. The first time, it made it all the way to Gov. Schwarzenegger's desk only to have him veto it in January 2007 because, he said, the bill was premature.

The public seems to support labeling cloned food. In a poll by the Consumers Union last year, 89 percent of people said they wanted cloned food to be labeled. Another 69 percent said they are concerned about cloned food in general.

Labeling would also mean that cloned food would have to be tracked more efficiently than it is now, adding expense to ranchers and dairy farms that would use the technology. "Labeling not only gives consumers a choice, it forces a better tracking system, which the industry doesn't want because it is too expensive," says Spector. "But with the problems with beef like E. coli and mad cow disease, we need a better tracking system anyway. We need a way to track the cow all the way from birth to plate."

At the very least, labeling would let consumers choose whether they want to eat cloned food. But that may not be sufficient protection from a technology that could carry unforeseen consequences, says Margulis.

"Labeling is the minimum we should expect," he asserts. "Once it has been proven safe, it should still be labeled for people who don't want to take part in the technology for ethical or religious reasons.

"But labeling," Margulis stresses, "should be the *last* step here, not the first."

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