**UPDATED** EFSA’s consultation and opinion on animal cloning

EFSA has a published draft opinion on the implications of animal cloning on food safety, animal health and welfare and the environment.

This article has been updated with news concerning the European Parliament motion for resolution on the cloning of animals for food supply and with news on the delay of EFSA’s final opinion.

EFSA’s public consultation on animal cloning

EFSA has held a public consultation on its draft scientific opinion on the implications of animal cloning on food safety, animal health and welfare and the environment.

The European Commission requested EFSA for advice on animal cloning in February 2007.

The main conclusions of the draft opinion from EFSA include:

- Death and disease rates of clones are significantly higher than those observed in conventionally reproduced animals. Based on a number of parameters, healthy clones and healthy offspring do not show any significant differences from their conventional counterparts.
- Health and welfare of a significant proportion of clones have been found to be adversely affected.
- Food products obtained from healthy cattle and big clones (meat and milk) are within the normal range with respect to the composition and nutritional value. Therefore, EFSA concludes that it is very unlikely that any difference exists in terms of food safety between food products originating from clones and their offspring.
- No environmental impact is foreseen, but there is only limited data available.

EFSA acknowledges with this draft opinion that the technique used for animal cloning (Somatic Cell Nucleus Transfer= SCNT) is a new technology and the data for risk assessment is limited.

A stakeholder meeting was held in February discussing this opinion. See the meeting report here.

The European Commission also requested an opinion from the European Group on Ethics in Science (EGE) which concluded that at present the production of cloned food cannot be justified.

The European Group on Ethics in Science concluded on 17 January 2008 that due to the level of suffering of the mothers into which a cloned embryo is place and the health problems of the animal clones themselves, the group has doubts as to whether cloning animals for food supply is ethically justified.

The EGE made the comments in a published opinion on the ethical aspects of animal cloning for food supply. This opinion is in stark contrast to the opinion of EFSA. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued its own opinion on 16 January 2008, also declaring cloned food safe for consumption.

Additionally, if cloned food would be allowed into Europe, the EGE calls for a system of labelling.

European Parliament motion for resolution on the cloning of animal food

On May 2008 the European Parliament has launched a motion for resolution on the cloning of animals for food supply.
Calls on the Commission to prohibit animal cloning for food, imports of cloned animals, their offspring and semen, and products from cloned animals or their offspring;

Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

The motion for resolution is included on the agenda of the Agriculture Committee, to be hold the next 26 May 2008. At the meeting a set of pertinent questions will be raised.

According to the agenda of the Agriculture Committee, the deadline for amendments is 3 June 2008.

**EFSA’s opinion delayed**

EFSA will give it’s final opinion on in July, later than foreseen, due to a number of scientific views given by EU states and industry in the consultation. Most of the comments were about uncertainties and lack of scientific evidence.

There is great concern from different opposing groups and organisations about the effects on nutrition and biology, while the advocates of livestock cloning say the technology will help produce more milk, and lean, tender meat by creating more disease-resistant animals. They also insist that cloning is safe. despite the lack of scientific base.

**Parliament Votes in Favour of Ban**

On 3 September 2008, European parliamentarians voted with an overwhelming majority in favour of a proposal to ban cloning of animals for food.

No fewer than 630 MEPs voted in favour and only 32 against. The motion for resolution was initiated by the Intergroup on Animal Welfare, and urges the Commission to prohibit cloning of animals for food and any products from cloned animals and their offspring. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published its final opinion on 24 July this year, which outlined grave concerns over the impact of cloning on animal welfare while emphasising there are still too many uncertainties about the technology.

The news has been welcomed by Eurogroup for Animals, a group which provides the secretariat for the Parliamentary Intergroup on Animal Welfare and which has been campaigning against cloning for food.

**For more information**

- Technical meeting with EFSA’s Stakeholder Consultative Platform on its draft Opinion on animal cloning, February 2008
- EFSA’s website, Animal Cloning section
- EFSA statement on the publication of the opinion of the European Group on Ethics and New Technologies on ethical aspects of animal cloning for the food supply
- Website of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technology

**EPHA related articles**

- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) Work Plan 2008
- An international informal debate on ethics and science
- **Update** EFSA calls for Scientific data on applications of Nanotechnology and Nanomaterials used in Food and Feed, February 2008

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