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Parliament calls for EU ban on cloning for food

[de] [fr]

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The European Parliament reiterated its opposition to meat and milk produced from cloned animals yesterday (7 July), piling pressure on the European Commission to ban food produced in this way.

Voting on Wednesday, the Parliament reaffirmed its [first-reading position](#) to exclude food derived from cloned animals or their offspring from a draft EU regulation on novel foods.

The Commission and EU member states would like to regulate the sale of "novel foods" – defined as food made with new production processes or which was not widely consumed before 1997.

But MEPs have adopted a more restrictive approach, asking the Commission to table a separate legislative proposal to expressly ban food from cloned animals and their descendants.

If EU countries reject the Parliament's position, a [conciliation procedure](#) will be launched to find a compromise.

In the meantime, the Parliament is asking for a moratorium on all sales of food derived from cloning, a position it has maintained since it first passed a [resolution](#) on the matter in 2008.

The Commission's [initial proposal](#) for a novel foods regulation would have regulated food derived from cloned animals but not their traditionally-bred offspring. EU member states, meanwhile, would like to see [both](#) addressed under the new rules.

'No to nanofoods' until risks assessed

On nanofoods, the Parliament was equally assertive. While it agreed that nano-sized ingredients in food should be subject to EU regulations, it called for a moratorium on their use until specific risk assessments have proven that they are safe.

In addition, the House wants clear labelling to warn consumers that the food they are going to eat contains nano-ingredients.

Trade problems in sight?

The safety of food derived from cloning is currently not questioned by the EU or US authorities ([EurActiv 18/01/08](#); [EurActiv 25/07/08](#)).

But the US Food and Drug Administration has encouraged American farmers to voluntarily keep their cloned animals off the market during an unspecified transition period to allow the US Department of Agriculture to work with interested industry stakeholders to "ensure a smooth and seamless transition into the marketplace for these products".

The European Parliament's call for complete ban on food from clones, if followed by the 27 member states, could thus lead to yet another bitter transatlantic food trade dispute sometime in the future.

Examples of major EU-US trade disputes in the food and agriculture sector include those concerning genetically modified organisms, hormone beef and chlorinated chicken.

BACKGROUND

The EU's current [Novel Foods Regulation](#) dates back to May 1997. It does not cover foods developed since then that use nanotechnology, for example, nor does it cover foods that are traditionally consumed outside the EU.

Following a stakeholder [consultation](#) on the regulation in 2002, the European Commission adopted a legislative [proposal](#) to amend the current Novel Foods Regulation in January 2008 ([EurActiv 15/01/08](#)).

The aim, according to the EU executive, is to allow "for safe and innovative foods to reach the EU market faster" and to encourage the development of "new types of foods and food production techniques".

The regulation would create a centralised authorisation system to simplify and speed up the process of authorisation for novel foods. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) would be responsible for carrying out the risk assessment for a novel food application and, if judged safe, the Commission would then propose its authorisation.

Only novel foods that are included on the Community list after assessment by the EFSA may be placed on the market.

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POSITIONS

Dutch MEP Kartika Liotard (European United Left-Nordic Green Left), who steered the novel foods regulation through Parliament, said "a clear majority in the European Parliament supports ethical objections to the industrial production of cloned meat for food".

"Cloned animals suffer disproportionately highly from illnesses, malformations and premature death. MEPs have been calling for proper regulation for years: it's high time the Commission listened to the European Parliament and citizens on this issue."

Citing the results of a 2008 Eurobarometer, which showed that a majority of EU citizens are not willing to accept animal cloning for food production, Liotard said that "the Commission can no longer ignore the will of the majority of citizens".

"We will continue to press the Commission to produce a separate legislative proposal to prohibit food from clones and their offspring in order to protect consumers and uphold environmental and animal health standards," she added.

French MEP Corinne Lepage (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) added that "although no safety concerns have been identified so far with meat produced from cloned animals, this technique raises serious issues about animal welfare and reduction of biodiversity, as well as ethical concerns".

Scottish Conservative MEP Struan Stevenson welcomed the vote to ban imported foods from cloned animals and their immediate descendants from entering the EU food chain.

In a press statement he noted that current EU rules state that only third-generation or later offspring from cloned animals can be sold for food, but that "no such rules apply" in countries like America, Canada, Argentina and Brazil, which are major exporters of beef and semen to the EU and where "cloning is widespread and unregulated".

"I have no wish to trigger a trade war with any countries outside the EU, but they have to realise that their exports must comply with the same standards we apply to our own home-grown products. There must be a level playing field. If there is no scientific test available to test for cloned meat then all imports should be clearly labelled 'This meat may have come from a cloned animal'. This would enable EU consumers to make their own choice on what to buy," Stevenson added.

The **Eurogroup for Animals**, which represents European animal welfare organisations, welcomed the vote in favour of a ban on cloning animals for food, which it believes will put "immense pressure on the European Commission to come forward with clear legislation to enforce such a ban and ensure that no products from cloned animals or their offspring are put on the European market".

In addition to causing unnecessary animal suffering and treating farm animals as mere "commodities rather than sentient beings," the group argues that widespread use of cloning would also "greatly reduce genetic diversity within livestock populations, increasing the chances of whole herds being wiped out by disease to which they would all be equally susceptible".

In addition, cloning of farm animals would undermine EU subsidies to farmers who conserve traditional breeds of livestock and go against the EU's rural development objective of preserving the genetic diversity of farm animals, it said.

The **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)** welcomed the Parliament's backing for "strong safety and labelling measures for food containing nanomaterials," as well as the moratorium.

NEXT STEPS

- **Sept. 2010:** Parliament and Council to start conciliation talks on novel foods regulation.

LINKS

EU official documents

- PreLex: [Proposal for a Regularion on novel foods \[FR\] \[DE\]](#)
- Oeil: [Proposal for a Regularion on novel foods \[FR\]](#)

European Union

- Commission: [Novel foods](#)
- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA): [Cloning \[FR\] \[DE\]](#)
- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA): [Opinion on Food Safety, Animal Health and Welfare and Environmental Impact of Animals derived from Cloning by Somatic Cell Nucleus Transfer \(SCNT\) and their Offspring and Products Obtained from those Animals \(15 July 2008\) \[FR\] \[DE\]](#)
- European Group on Ethics of science and new technologies (EGE): [Ethical aspects of animal cloning for food supply - Opinion No 23 \(16 January 2008\)](#)

Parliament

- European Parliament news: [MEPs call for ban on food from cloned animals \(7 July 2010\)](#)

Political Groups

- Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left: [MEPs back left's call to exclude cloning from novel foods rules](#) (7 July 2010)
- Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance: [MEPs vote to put consumers' interests first on clone food and Nano food](#) (7 July 2010)
- Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe [Novel Foods: ALDE favours food from farms instead of food factories](#) (7 July 2010)

Political Parties

- Conservatives in the European Parliament: [Conservative MEP welcomes EU vote to prohibit imported cloned animals foods](#) (7 July 2010)

Governments

- US Food and Drug Administration: [Animal Cloning](#)

NGOs and Think-Tanks

- Eurogroup for Animals: [European Parliament pushes for cloning ban](#) (7 July 2010)
- European Environmental Bureau (EEB): [Nano food: European Parliament puts safety first](#) (7 July 2010)

Letters To The Editor

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Phil Newton, European Crop Protection Association

Risk not hazard for good pesticides regulation

James Gilmour, former director, Agricultural Advisory Service for Scotland

Biofuels play small role in food prices

Joe Jobe, National Biodiesel Board (USA)

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