

Cloning of animals for food supply

Compassion in World Farming believes there should be an EU-wide ban on the cloning of animals for food and on the sale of meat and milk from cloned animals and their offspring.

Cloning involves severe animal suffering

Scientific Opinions by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) show that cloning entails serious health and welfare problems for both cloned animals and their surrogate dams.

Impact on health and welfare of surrogate dams

EFSA states that there is an increase in pregnancy failure in cattle and pigs that are carrying a clone and increased frequencies of abnormal or difficult birth especially in cattle. This, together with the increased size of cloned offspring, makes Caesarean sections more frequent in cattle carrying a clone than with conventional pregnancies.

Impact on health and welfare of clones

In its 2008 Opinion on cloning, EFSA concludes: "The health and welfare of a significant proportion of clones, mainly within the juvenile period for bovines and perinatal period for pigs, have been found to be adversely affected, often severely and with a fatal outcome."

The majority of cloned embryos die during pregnancy. Of those that survive, a significant proportion die shortly after birth or during the following weeks from cardiovascular failure, respiratory problems, liver or kidney failure, immunodeficiencies or musculoskeletal abnormalities. Significantly, EFSA stresses that "the mortality rate of clones is considerably higher than in sexually produced animals".

European Group on Ethics

The Opinion of the European Group on Ethics (EGE) in Science and New Technologies concluded 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". The EGE added that it "does not see convincing arguments to justify the production of food from clones and their offspring".

Likely suffering of cloned animals and their offspring when raised on-farm

To correctly assess the long-term impact of cloning, it is important to consider the ways in which cloning is likely to be used within the livestock sector. The likelihood is that cloning will be used to produce multiple copies of the highest yielding cows and fastest growing pigs. Yet research shows that traditional selective breeding has already led to major health problems for such animals. EFSA has concluded that

“genetic selection for high milk yield is the major factor causing poor welfare, in particular health problems, in dairy cows” and that genetic selection of pigs for rapid growth has led to leg disorders and cardiovascular malfunction. The cloning of the most fast growing and high yielding animals will lead to an even higher proportion of animals suffering from such health and welfare problems.

Legal position

Cloning is arguably unlawful under paragraph 20 of the Annex to Council Directive 98/58 which provides that: “Natural or artificial breeding or breeding procedures which cause or are likely to cause suffering or injury to any of the animals concerned must not be practised.” However, the position should be clarified by the adoption of a Regulation that specifically addresses the cloning of animals for food production.

Proposed Novel Foods Regulation & the overall issue of cloning animals for food

We support the European Parliament’s position that the proposed Novel Foods Regulation should prohibit the placing on the market of meat or dairy products derived from cloned animals or their offspring.

We agree with the Council that the Novel Foods Regulation cannot address all the issues of cloning and that therefore the Commission should produce a report on all aspects of food from cloned animals and their offspring. However, we disagree with the Council that in the meantime the Novel Foods Regulation should allow such food to be placed on the market.

We agree with the 24 Member States who in March 2010 produced a statement that food from clones and their offspring should be regulated by specific legislation. We believe that the Commission’s report and any legislation should be based on the Parliament’s 2008 resolution that called for a prohibition for food supply purposes of:

- (i) the cloning of animals
- (ii) the farming of cloned animals or their offspring
- (iii) the placing on the market of meat or dairy products derived from cloned animals or their offspring, and
- (iv) the importing of cloned animals, their offspring, semen and embryos from cloned animals or their offspring, and meat or dairy products derived from cloned animals or their offspring.

Offspring of cloned animals

We are extremely concerned about the Commission’s position of wishing to exclude the offspring of clones from any restriction imposed by the proposed Novel Foods Regulation on the placing of food from clones on the market.

We are opposed to this and believe that it is essential for the offspring of clones to be included in the EU’s policy approach to cloning for food supply. Clones will primarily be used as elite breeding animals. It is their offspring that will be farmed for meat or milk. A prohibition on the sale of meat and milk from clones (but not their offspring) would not act as a restraint on cloning as the production of clones will be commercially attractive as long as the meat and milk from their offspring (even if not from the clones themselves) can be marketed.

In conclusion, the cloning of farm animals is taking EU agriculture in the wrong direction - towards perpetuating industrial farming when all other societal trends point towards sustainable farming and respect for animals as sentient beings.

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