

Society Will Reject Cloned Farm Animals

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The first cloned animals are making their way from private labs into our food supply. Even if the foods are safe, most people agree that scientists have no business cloning farm animals. From an ethical point of view, cloning raises very significant issues associated with animal welfare and the slippery slope to human cloning.

Research clearly demonstrate that most people do not want to consume food from cloned animals. However, under current government policy, consumers have no choice about consuming meat or milk from such animals. FDA does not require that cloned animals be kept separate within the food supply, despite the fact that their own scientific advisory committee would not endorse product safety.

Scientists acknowledge that cloning involves the pointless suffering of hundreds of animals that are either born deformed or aborted along the way. The one successful clone is expected to mass produce off-spring or milk during its shortened life. Many people have legitimate concerns about animal welfare and believe that animals have some basic rights.

Research shows that women, in particular, care a lot about animals (and are much more likely than men to reject animal cloning.) Research demonstrates that people develop strong emotional bonds with companion animals. They also believe animals possess high levels of intelligence, feelings and even souls (e.g., Saving Nemo and Babe in the City).

Another reason for greater concern over animal cloning relates to the fact that animals are closer to humans in evolutionary terms than are plants or microbes. Some consumers worry that once scientists are able to modify or clone animals than humans will be next. People fear a "slippery slope" that may result from breaking down species barriers. The fact that animals are used in scientific experiments leads people to recall "Frankenstein," "Multiplicity," or other sci-fi images.

Public confidence in the government is a major determinant of how likely consumers will be to accept foods produced with new technologies. Unfortunately, the National Academy of Sciences concluded several years ago that the federal regulatory system for animal biotechnology is inadequate. In fact, because regulations for cloned farm animals are still not yet established, such animals may already be in the food supply. We have no way of knowing!

Public policies must be based on greater respect for consumers' rights to feel comfortable about their food supply (which means the right to an informed choice.) Unfortunately, the current Bush regime has dusted off policies laid out by then Vice President Quayle in 1992 – to take the shackles off the biotechnology industry.

The FDA and USDA have been locked in a turf war over animal biotech for at least five years which has led to the current climate of mistrust and lack of public participation. The FDA is trying to force this complex and emotional technology into an existing regulatory framework that is no longer even credible for plant biotechnology. The reliance on substantial equivalence will not serve the broader public interest. American consumers will become much less trusting of all forms of biotechnology if they believe they have no choice about whether or not to consume milk from cloned livestock.

The animal biotechnology industry is clearly out-of-touch with market reality. Nothing has been done to pave the way for the use of these powerful scientific tools in meat and milk production. The small firms who are leading the R&D for animal biotechnology have no track record with the farm or food sectors. They do not understand or appreciate the concerns of the food industry or consumers.

Cloning represents nothing but headaches for everyone except the companies creating the cloned cows. Concerned consumers will continue their switch from dairy products to the soymilk, juice and other beverages. More and more consumers are becoming full or part-vegetarians. Dairy and livestock producers, as well as the food industry, will bare the brunt of consumer outrage over cloning.

The bottom line is that meat or milk from cloned animals will never be accepted in the market and must not be secretly force-fed to consumers. Consumers and the food industry have made it clear that they will reject meat or milk from such animals. Cloning of farm animals is a technology in search of a market. Any farmers who purchase such pricey animals will be buying "white elephants."

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