



## FDA says cloning is safe, but USDA says more time needed

By Sara Wyant, Editor, Agri-Pulse

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A long-awaited Food and Drug Administration (FDA) report concludes that foods from healthy cloned animals and their offspring are as safe as those from ordinary animals, reaching some of the same conclusions of a study released last week by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The FDA tentatively declared food from cloned animals safe in 2003 and then came to the same conclusion after a draft risk assessment at the end of 2006. But publication of the final report has been delayed by several forces, including some from the dairy industry, which has expressed concern that allowing commercial sale of milk from cloned cows would cause consumers to avoid it and depress exports. The International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA), in a statement last Friday after publication of the EFSA findings, urged FDA to take account of **“the unintended negative economic, trade and public health impacts of approving a niche technology too soon.”** FDA should take the time to weigh and respond to more than 30,000 comments the agency received over the last year, said IDFA President Connie Tipton. “Nothing is more important to milk processors than the trust people have in milk and milk products.”

While USDA fully supports and agrees with the FDA's final assessment, the agency called for additional time to build acceptance. USDA Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Bruce Knight requested an ongoing **“voluntary moratorium” to buy time for “an acceptance process” that he says should take months, rather than years.**

“USDA will join with technology providers, producers, processors, retailers and domestic and international customers to facilitate the marketing of meat and milk from clones. **We'll be working closely with stakeholders to ensure a smooth and seamless transition into the marketplace for these products,**” Knight explained. “At the same time, we understand there are currently only about 600 animal clones in the U.S., and most of them are breeding animals, so few clones will ever arrive in the marketplace.” In conjunction with FDA, USDA also will implement the report language in the 2008 omnibus appropriations bill suggesting a study of domestic agricultural and international trade economic implications of commercialization of milk and meat from animal clones.

In 2001, U.S. producers agreed to refrain from introducing meat or milk from clones or their progeny into the food supply until FDA could further evaluate the issue. Major meat processors like Tyson and Smithfield Foods aren't planning to produce meat from cloned animals anytime soon. “The science involved in cloning animals is relatively new,” Smithfield said in a prepared statement. **“As thoughtful leaders in our industry, we will continue to monitor further scientific research on this technology.”**

Reaction from farm and consumer organizations was mixed. American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman supported the FDA report and noted that: “It has gone through the appropriate regulatory review process and has been found to be safe; therefore, farmers should have the option of using it. **The technology will improve breeding stock and, eventually, the quality, safety and healthfulness of our food.**”

However, **Jerry Kozak, President and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation supported the continued moratorium:** “While we are reassured that the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) review finds no health or safety issues with food from cloned animals, we strongly support the request made to continue the moratorium on the marketing of cloned animals and their products during a transition period allowing for the examination of the potential economic implications of a change in the marketing environment.”

**National Farmers Union (NFU) President Tom Buis** expressed concerns and called for labeling cloned food products. "In the face of ever-increasing food safety concerns, it is troubling to see the FDA approval of products from cloned animals to be sold to the public, when questions surrounding the health risks, legal implications and ethical concerns remain unanswered," said Buis. "The economic implications of introducing products from cloned animals into the marketplace could be potentially devastating for family farmers and consumers.”

**Consumer Federation of America’s President Carol Tucker Foreman** also expressed dismay. “The Bush Administration, after days of internal debate, has rejected public opposition and the pleas of the food industry and consumer groups and approved putting milk and meat from cloned animals in our food,” she said in a statement. **“Milk and meat from cloned animals and their offspring will enter the food supply.** They can do so immediately. The products will not be labeled as such and American consumers will have no way to avoid consuming them.”

The debate will likely continue through a series of Congressional hearings. Energy and Commerce Committee Vice Chair Diana DeGette (D-CO) called on her subcommittee to hold hearings into the potential risks and challenges of foods derived from cloned animals. For more information on the 968-page final risk assessment, visit <http://www.fda.gov/cvm/cloning.htm>.

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