

Why Cloned Food Should Be Inedible and Unacceptable

The mission of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is to protect the public's health through assuring the safety of our nation's food supply. The FDA's purpose is NOT to facilitate the dumping of dubious food products onto people's dinner plates for the sake of corporate profit. That is why it is so disturbing to hear about the FDA's Dec. 28, 2006 determination that cloned livestock byproducts are indeed safe for human consumption, and to read a subsequent wave of editorials clamoring for fullblown commercialization of cloned milk and meat.

Many people first learned about animal cloning back in 1997 when a sheep named "Dolly" was splashed across paper headlines and television screens. This sheep was created using a technique known as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), involving the transfer of genetic material from one animal into the egg of another and the subsequent implantation into the womb of a host. Biotech companies and venture capitalists were quick to tout the potential benefits of livestock cloning for producing pharmaceuticals, human organ transplants, as well as milk and meat. Left unsaid was that the average "Dolly" never sees the light of day, since 90% of cloned fetuses die before birth along with up to 25% of the surrogate mothers. In order to keep these hosts alive, cloning also requires much higher than usual animal treatment with hormones and antibiotics.

There are many valid reasons to be opposed to the sale of such milk and meat that go beyond the ethical debate about cloning itself. First of all, the FDA's decision relies upon the discredited pseudo-science of "substantial equivalence." Dairy farmers and milk drinkers may recall that the FDA first unveiled this shoddy notion back in 1993 when it railroaded through approval of recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH). Of course, now we know from a real scientific study (May 2006 Journal of Reproductive Health) that milk induced through genetic engineering is NOT the same as natural milk. But, because of the FDA's irresponsible rubberstamping, U.S. consumers are now suffering reproductive problems from having ingested rBGH dairy products for years with elevated levels of Insulin Like Growth Factor – 1 (IGF-1).

Statements by government officials and biotech apologists that cloned animals are "simply genetic twins" are also patently misleading. There have been numerous studies showing that once born cloned animals still suffer higher than normal morbidity and deformity rates. According to a leading cloning researcher, MIT Prof. Rudolph Jaenisch, "You can not make normal clones. The ones that survive will just be less abnormal than the ones that die early." Basic science – let alone common sense - would suggest that this is symptomatic of other physiological problems and might not make a very healthy meal. Ian Wilmut, one of the scientists who created "Dolly," has publicly warned that even a slight imbalance in a cloned animal's hormone, protein, or fat levels could pose a danger to any would-be consumer. Nonetheless, one of the leading cloning outfits, ViaGen, has already entered into negotiations with Smithfield to put cloned pork into their products.

Worse yet, cloned animals are proposed for the production of industrial enzymes, pharmaceuticals, and other genetically engineered (GE) substances – aka biopharming. Longterm scientific studies have not been done to disprove concerns that biopharming residues will find their way into cloned meat/milk and then into people's mouths. It is bad enough having to worry about Mad Cow being served up with a hamburger, let alone GE spider webs.

Another criticism with the FDA's decision is that it undermines one of the fundamental principles of economic efficiency and marketplace competition, by failing to require labeling.

Consumers can not make rational informed choices when they are denied the right to know about their food. By frustrating consumer sovereignty for the sake of corporate secrecy, the FDA is failing to serve the public interest. Given the sordid history behind rBGH, one would suspect that FDA approval of cloned food will give the green light to powerful corporations and their proxies to sue and/or fine smaller producers for daring to use the First Amendment and label their products as “clone-free.” So much for the free market idea.

Once again, it seems the FDA is over eager to become an accomplice in the corporate force feeding of questionable byproducts to an unwitting populace. Whether it is genetic engineering, biopharming, nanotechnology, irradiation, or cloning, it is hard to escape the thought that U.S farmers and consumers are now guinea pigs caught up in some massive Frankenfood experiment that the rest of the world is wise enough to watch from a safe distance.

Contact the FDA to Stop the Sale of Cloned Milk and Meat!

There is now a 90 day public comment period on the FDA's recent decision that cloned milk and meat are "substantially equivalent" to conventional livestock products and hence fit for human consumption. The deadline for public feedback is April 2nd, 2007. Please refer to Docket 2006P-0145 in any comments to the FDA.

By internet:

www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/oc/dockets/comments/commentdocket.cfm?AGENCY=FDA

By mail:

FDA Div. Dockets Mgmt. (HFA-305) 5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061 Rockville, MD 20857

By phone:

Toll free 1-888-463-6332

You can also contact your elected officials to demand mandatory consumer labeling and comprehensive safety testing of ALL food that is cloned or genetically engineered.

Congressional Switchboard: 1-202-224-3121

For more information:

Family Farm Defenders, 1019 Williamson St. #B, Madison, WI 53703
#608-260-0900 www.familyfarmdefenders.org

Center for Food Safety, 600 Pennsylvania Ave #302, Washington DC, 20003
202-547-9359 www.centerforfoodsafety.org

Food and Water Watch, 1400 16th Street NW #225, Washington, DC 20036
202-797-6550 www.foodandwaterwatch.org

Organic Consumers Association, 6771 South Silver Hill Drive, Finland MN 55603
#218-226-4164 www.organicconsumers.org