



BEUC COMMENTS ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPORT ON CLONING FOR FOOD PRODUCTION

Contact: Giuseppe Simone – food@beuc.eu

Ref.: X/087/2010 - 21/12/10

BEUC, the European Consumers' Organisation
80 rue d'Arlon, 1040 Bruxelles - +32 2 743 15 90 - www.beuc.eu

 EC register for interest representatives: identification number 9505781573-45 

Summary

On 19 October 2010 the European Commission published a Report on animal cloning for food production. The report reviews the different aspects of cloning in light of the current legislative framework, including consumers' perceptions and public attitudes towards animal cloning.

Recent Eurobarometer surveys showed that cloning animals for food products is one of the most widespread concerns among Europeans: they have strong reservations about animal cloning in food production, do not see the benefits, and feel that it should not be encouraged. Moreover, the vast majority of respondents are worried that they are not able to choose to avoid possible risks from animal cloning. Therefore, BEUC believes that animal cloning should not be allowed for food production purposes.

BEUC welcomes the Commission proposal for a temporary suspension of the cloning technique and the import of cloned animals for food production in the EU, the placing on the market of food from cloned animals and the proposal for setting a compulsory traceability system of clones and their reproductive materials.

However, we believe that these measures do not go far enough. If the Commission wants their measures to be meaningful, in terms of protection of animal and human health, more comprehensive measures which would also address a temporary suspension and traceability of offspring of clones, their reproductive materials, and the placing on the market of food derived from offspring of clones, should be established.

In order to ensure full traceability 'from farm to fork' BEUC urges the Commission to set up:

- a full compulsory traceability system (which includes clones and their offspring);
- a suitable risk assessment and authorisation procedure complemented by a compulsory labelling system for food derived from clones and their offspring, should the temporary suspension be lifted in the future.

In addition, the Commission should propose the appropriate amendments to the legislation on organic production in order to prohibit the use of semen derived from cloned animals for breeding animals subject to the organic livestock production.

Cloning: a consumers' issue

BEUC, the European Consumers' Organisation welcomes the publication of the Report¹ from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council on animal cloning for food production.

Given the current lack of traceability rules and information about whether products derived from cloned animals or their offspring are in food, BEUC welcomes the proposal to suspend temporarily the use of the cloning technique for reproduction of food producing animals in the EU, the use of clones and the marketing of food from clones as well as to establish a traceability system for imports of semen and embryos of clones.

However, we regret that the Commission does not intend to propose that the temporary suspension also applies to offspring of clones, derived food and to set up a compulsory full traceability system 'from farm to fork'.

Although the Commission Report acknowledges to a certain extent that opinion surveys, including the 2008 EU-wide Eurobarometer survey², have clearly highlighted a high level of consumer concern, it does not mention that the vast majority of Europeans do not want foods derived from cloned animals in the food chain.

A more recent special Eurobarometer survey on 'Food-related risks'³ shows that cloning animals for food products is one of the most widespread concerns of Europeans among the seventeen possible specific food-related risks that they spontaneously indicated. About a third (30%) of EU citizens say they are **very worried** about it and approximately a further 35% feel **fairly worried**, resulting in a total of about **65% of Europeans** who **worry to some degree about animal cloning for food production**.

Only 42% of EU citizens believe that public authorities in the EU are adequately dealing with the "possible risks from new technologies (animal cloning and nanotechnology)" and the survey clearly shows that potential risks related to new technologies like cloning are not regarded as easily avoidable by taking personal steps.

Another recently published Eurobarometer survey⁴ showed - once again, that Europeans have strong reservations and clear concern about the safety of animal cloning in food production. In fact, two out of three Europeans do not find animal cloning in food production either good or safe for their health, their family's health or for future generations

Looking at the benefits and the risks of animal cloning in food production, a majority of Europeans feel that it benefits some people but puts others at risk and they believe that government should take responsibility for ensuring that benefits from new technologies are for all. Therefore, animal cloning should be tightly regulated by government against free market practices.

¹ [COM 2010/585](#)

² Flash Eurobarometer, October 2008, Europeans' attitude towards animal cloning, Analytical Report.

³ 354, November 2010

⁴ 341, October 2010

The current situation where European consumers have no information about or control over whether products derived from cloned animals or their offspring are in their food is unacceptable.

In order to address the current legal vacuum, BEUC calls for specific legislative measures with regard to the traceability of clones and their offspring to be established as a matter of urgency and in accordance with a strict timeline.

In the meanwhile, besides the temporary suspension as proposed by the Commission, BEUC also calls for the temporary suspension of the use of offspring of clones and the marketing of food from offspring of clones.

Likewise, since food derived from clones and their offspring cannot be distinguished from food derived from other animals, should the temporary suspension be lifted in the future, the traceability system should be extended to the derived food products in order to provide consumers with appropriate labelling information about the origin of food and enable them to make an informed choice.

Cloning and scientific uncertainty

The overall conclusions of EFSA's opinion on cloning of 2008⁵ were that "[cloning] *is a relatively new technology in animal reproduction with **limited data available***".

EFSA concluded also that "*while cloning has been applied to several animal species, **only in the case of cattle and pigs has been sufficient [sic] data available to perform a risk assessment***". In fact EFSA restricted its assessment of 2008 "*to **animal health and animal welfare of cattle and pig clones and their offspring, the food safety of products derived from those animals, and the possible implications of SCNT for the environment and genetic diversity***".

However, EFSA also concluded that the risk assessment performed was affected by **uncertainties** "*due to the limited number of studies available, the small samples size investigated and, in general, the absence of a uniform approach that would allow all the issues relevant to this opinion to be more satisfactorily addressed*".

EFSA also made general and additional recommendations for further investigations and data collection as regards animal health, animal welfare as well as food safety aspects.

These conclusions and recommendations have been reiterated and confirmed by EFSA in both its 2009⁶ and 2010⁷ statements.

Food safety...uncertainty and trade issues

When analysing trade issues, the Commission stated in its report that "*there is no scientific evidence which could justify restrictions on food from clones and food from offspring from clones based on human health concerns*" and that "*the assessment of the situation shows that it is scientifically accepted that there are no food safety concerns about food produced from clones or their offspring*".

⁵ The EFSA Journal (2008) 767, 1-49

⁶ The EFSA Journal (2009) RN 319, 1-15

⁷ EFSA Journal 2010:8(9):1784

Considering the limitations and uncertainties which are acknowledged by EFSA as affecting the risk assessment, BEUC believes that the Commission generalised the conclusions of EFSA's opinion and statements, both in terms of animal species considered in the risk assessment and in terms of food safety concerns.

In fact, EFSA's risk assessment is limited to food products derived from two animal species only (namely meat and milk from cattle and meat and meat products from pigs). Moreover, in its 2009 statement EFSA replied to the explicit request formulated by the Commission aiming to know as "*to what extent the current knowledge applies to cloning of sheep, goats and chickens [...]*" by confirming that "*there is still not sufficient data on species other than cattle and pigs to perform a risk assessment*".

As regards food safety, EFSA concluded that "*there is no indication that differences exists in terms of food safety between food products from healthy cattle and pig clones and their progeny, compared with those from healthy conventionally-bred animals*". Nevertheless EFSA acknowledged that the database on compositional and nutritional characteristics is limited and it recommended extending it. Moreover, EFSA stated that "*such a conclusion is based on the assumption that meat from cattle and pigs is derived from healthy animals*" while at the same time expressed uncertainties as to whether and to what extent consumption of meat and milk of clones or their offspring may lead to an increased human exposure to transmissible agents (see public health considerations below).

BEUC considers these reasons as sufficient to justify temporary restrictions on trade of food from clones and their offspring and to address the concerns of almost one half of Europeans who feel that decisions about animal cloning should be based primarily on scientific evidence.

Moreover, according to CLITRAVI (the European meat processing industry association)⁸, products from cloned animals and/or their offspring are already present on the European market. It should be noted in this respect that an appropriate traceability and labelling system is currently missing, therefore European consumers have no information about and are not enabled to choose whether they want to eat products derived from cloned animals or their offspring. For this reason, BEUC believes that the temporary suspension and the compulsory traceability measures limited to clones as proposed by the Commission would have a very limited impact on the current market situation where it is rather food from offspring than food from clones which is commercialised.

Furthermore, it is likely that food from offspring of animal species other than cattle and pigs which did not undergo an appropriate risk assessment is/may be placed on the market

If the Commission wants their measures to be meaningful, it is necessary to extend the temporary suspension to offspring of clones and their food products until the scientific uncertainties are fully clarified and consumer demand for an informed choice addressed. An appropriate risk assessment and risk management procedure should be subsequently established and carried out on a case by case basis.

⁸ [COM 2010/585](#)

Animals + humans = one health

This is the motto of the EU animal health strategy which aims to put greater focus on precautionary measures, disease surveillance, controls and research in order to ensure a high level of public health and food safety by minimising the incidence of biological and chemical risks to humans.

The strategy is implemented through the animal health legislation and has as its basic aim "*to control infectious diseases*", as mentioned in the Commission report.

BEUC is concerned that in light of the uncertainties expressed by EFSA and its recommendation for further research as regards susceptibility to diseases and transmissible agents, these aims could be compromised by allowing imports of offspring and reproductive materials of clones.

In fact, EFSA indicated that there is only limited information on the immunological competence of clones (and their offspring) and on the occurrence of zoonotic infections or infestations (and related public health risk) in comparison with that of conventionally bred animals. Therefore the impact of cloning on the immune functions cannot be measured due to the low number of animals and few assays carried out. "*If such an impact should be present, it could modify the carrier state of the cloned animals with respect to infectious agents of animal and human health concern.*"

Furthermore, EFSA recommended to further investigate the immunocompetence and the susceptibility of clones and their offspring to diseases and transmissible agents when reared and kept under conventional husbandry conditions⁹ and concluded that "*should evidence become available of reduced immunocompetence of clones, it should be investigated whether, and if so, to what extent, consumption of meat and milk derived from clones or their offspring may lead to an increased human exposure to transmissible agents*".

Considering the uncertainty about the susceptibility to diseases and transmissible agents of clones and their offspring, BEUC is concerned that unhealthy animals may enter/remain in the food chain. In fact, although mandatory *ante-mortem* and *post-mortem* inspections allow for removing unhealthy animals from the food chain, it should be noted that such animals are taken away from the food chain only when overt signs of disease or injury are detected and that there might be cases where inspections may not detect diseases due to lack of effectiveness (sensitivity and specificity are not 100%) or because of the absence of signs of clinical disease (e.g. infections and infestations of pathogenic microorganisms such as salmonella and campylobacter). Only relying on inspections to pick up sick animals seems to be in contradiction with the general EU approach which is to try to prevent animal health issues (see above). Moreover, meat inspection rules under revision at EU level are currently considered as part of a modern integrated multi-disciplinary approach for animal health and food safety monitoring and surveillance.

⁹ The studies available showed that clones generally need more intensive care therefore the use of veterinary medicinal products (including antibiotics) for treatment may be greater than with in their natural comparators.

BEUC urges the Commission to propose the necessary amendments to the zootechnical and animal health legislation in order to introduce those identification and registration requirements allowing for full traceability of clones, reproductive materials from clones and offspring.

Ethical issues and animal welfare

BEUC welcomes the consideration given by the Commission to animal welfare issues as well as to moral and ethical aspects when proposing the temporary suspension of the cloning technique in the EU and the import and use of cloned animals for food production within the EU.

However, on the basis of the same consideration, we strongly believe that the same measure should be introduced also for the imports of progeny (offspring) and reproductive materials of clones (semen and offspring embryos). In fact, EFSA stressed that "*no specific studies on the welfare of the progeny of clones have been reported in livestock species*", and confirmed in 2010 that "*transgenerational studies in farm animals as well as long term behavioural studies have not been identified*".

BEUC believes that allowing imports of offspring and reproductive materials of clones from third countries would *de facto* encourage the use of the cloning technique in those countries, thus undermining the aims of the temporary suspension proposed for clones in terms of protection of animals kept for farming purposes.

Organic farming and traceability issues

The Commission reported that the current zootechnical legislation does not provide for any kind of certification of the reproduction technology used for breeding farm animals, nor of the origin of the reproductive materials used (semen and embryos). On the other hand, the current EU legislation on organic products, namely Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007, while prohibiting cloning and embryos transfer, allows artificial insemination techniques and does not explicitly prohibit the use of semen from clones.

Given the situation that products derived from offspring of cloned animals are being sold within the EU (source: CLITRAVI, see above), BEUC is concerned that some of these products may – lawfully, enter the market carrying an 'organic' label, thus undermining and disregarding the aim and scope of the Regulation on organic products. In particular fair competition, consumer confidence and protection of consumer interests would be seriously impaired.

BEUC considers that extending the temporary ban to offspring of clones would be an appropriate measure to avoid this paradox. The temporary ban would allow the Commission to: (1) adopt the necessary amendments to the veterinary and zootechnical legislation providing for full traceability of clones, reproductive materials from clones and offspring; (2) propose to amend the Council Regulation on organic production in order to prohibit the use of semen derived from cloned animals.

BEUC position as regards the options proposed by the Commission

The overwhelming majority of EU consumers do not want cloning to be used for food production purposes. BEUC believes that cloning for food holds no clear benefits for consumers. Cloning for food purposes may ultimately entail higher costs in terms of public health - due to an increased risk of potential transmission of pathogen agents and to an increased use of veterinary drugs such as antibiotics, and also in terms of cost of derived products due to the higher levels of husbandry care required.

In addition, the EFSA opinion and statements have shown that further research and data are required to clarify all concerns.

The Commission report on cloning examines both scientific and ethical aspects, however BEUC believes that the Commission failed to indicate clear consumer benefits which could justify the use of the cloning technique for food production purposes and that a precautionary approach should be used, given the high degree of uncertainty surrounding the matter.

BEUC agrees with the temporary suspension proposed by the Commission and furthermore calls for a **temporary suspension of offspring of clones also encompassing food derived from offspring of clones**. This temporary suspension should be in place at least until the knowledge gaps highlighted by EFSA are appropriately addressed and effective consumer choice can be ensured.

BEUC urges the Commission to propose the necessary amendments to the veterinary and zootechnical legislation in order to set up a **compulsory system of traceability of clones, their offspring and their reproductive materials** and in order to be able to enforce the temporary suspension.

Should the temporary suspension be lifted in the future, the Commission should ensure that **an appropriate risk assessment** on a case-by-case basis **and an authorisation procedure** are in place **for food derived from both clones and offspring**.

Such a procedure should be complemented by an appropriate **labelling system** which would allow consumers to identify food from cloned animals or offspring thereby enabling them exercise their right of choice, in contrast with the current unacceptable situation where consumers are unable to identify food derived from clones or their offspring.

Moreover, the Commission should propose the appropriate amendments to the Council Regulation on organic production in order to **prohibit the use of semen derived from cloned animals** for breeding animals subject to the **organic livestock production**.

End