

Food from FACTSHEET Animal Cloning

Why cloning animals for food?

The technique of animal cloning comes down to creating a near exact copy of a given animal. Remember Dolly? As shown on the picture, several steps were followed to give birth to the most famous sheep in the world back in 1996. With regard to food, cloning is used to multiply "elite" farm animals such as beef which produces tastier meat or high-yielding dairy cows.

Clones are mostly used for breeding purposes, i.e. to produce reproductive material (semen, ova and embryos). They are not meant to end up as a steak on consumers' plates unlike their offspring, which are meant to enter the food chain.

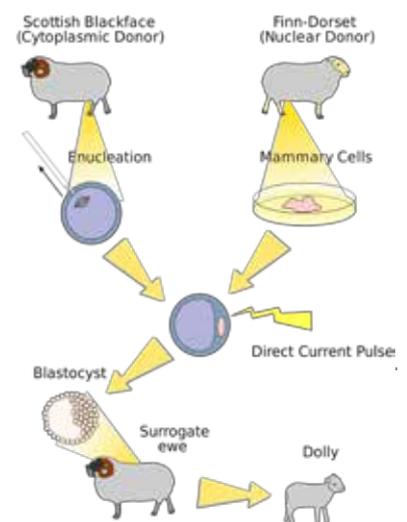
Is it safe to eat food from cloned animals?

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) declared that from the very limited evidence available no safety risk can be foreseen from eating food from clones and their progeny. However, EFSA has confirmed cloning poses animal welfare problems with many clones not surviving the birth process or dying within a short space time. As for the surrogate mothers (who carry the clones), they often have to endure pain, increased levels of miscarriages and difficult births as a result of clone abnormalities and unusually large offspring.

What about consumers?

An overwhelming majority of EU consumers do not want cloning to be used for food production. Beside the fact that they do not see any benefit, consumers fear the potential long-term health and safety impacts, not to mention animal welfare concerns. However, they have no way of knowing whether cloning has been used at some stage to produce their food.

To date, cloning is not used in the EU. No company has ever applied to sell food from cloned animals on the EU market. However, clones' reproductive material and live clone offspring can be imported to the EU from third countries such as the US, Brazil and Argentina. In other words, food from clone offspring can find its way onto the EU market without consumers having the slightest clue about it.



The cloning process that gave birth to Dolly
Source: Wikipedia

Today, EU consumers are unable to know whether their meat and milk come from cloned animals' offspring or descendants.

¹ 84% of respondents. "Europeans' attitudes towards animal cloning", Flash Barometer 238, Oct. 2008.
http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/resources/docs/eurobarometer_cloning_en.pdf



🗨️ Is cloning regulated in the EU?

Under the EU Novel Food regulation² of 1997, pre-market approval to sell meat and milk from clones is compulsory. Food from the offspring of clones, on the other hand, is not subject to any particular regulation.

This Novel Food regulation was due to be updated in 2011, but the cloning issue proved too much of a stumbling block and negotiations collapsed. The question of food from the offspring of clones, in particular, whether it should be subject to specific requirements - labelling at least - divided the Council and European Parliament.

In the end no compromise was reached and the European Commission promised a separate legislative proposal on cloning. Food from clones continues to be regulated under the existing Novel Food regulation, whilst food from the offspring of clones slips under the radar.

🗨️ What's next?

In December 2013, the Commission finally issued proposals³ which prohibited the use of cloning technique and the sale of food from clones in the EU. However, there is not a single word about clones' offspring or descendants, although these animals, unlike clones themselves, are the very ones used for food production.

Transatlantic trade is thought to have played a big role in the Commission's decision not to propose rules on food from clones' offspring. Unlabelled food derived from cloning is already widespread in the USA and setting up a compulsory traceability system would trigger a "trade war" with Europe's commercial partner, at the very time when the US and the EU are engaged in talks on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

In February 2014, the Parliament's Environment Committee stood on the consumers' side by voicing its strong disappointment with the Commission's proposals⁴. The dossiers are still with the Council and European Parliament.

🗨️ What does BEUC recommend?

BEUC's motto regarding food in general has always been the following: consumers must be able to know and choose what they eat. Of course, it also applies to cloning.

Because of consumers' lack of appetite for food from clones, The European Consumer Organisation deems that as well as prohibiting sale of food derived from cloned animals, **full traceability "from farm to fork" of clones, their offspring, descendants and food as well as proper labelling is warranted.**

This involves setting up a robust traceability system, not only for the live animals, but also their reproductive material (semen, ova and embryos). Traceability should go back as far as is scientifically possible. At the very least, we want food from the cloned animals' offspring to be labelled as such.

² Regulation (EC) No 258/97 on novel foods provides for the safety assessment and pre-market approval of all foods with no history of significant consumption in the EU before 1997 or produced by method(s) not previously used.

³ Commission proposals for a [Directive](#) on the use of the cloning technique and for a [Directive](#) on the placing on the market of food from clones.

⁴ See BEUC's [statement](#): EP says no to food from cloned animals