

Consumers reject food from cloned animals

By Paul Eccleston

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Most people don't want to see food from cloned animals and their offspring on supermarket shelves, new research reveals.

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They don't believe the food would be safe and feel it would be morally wrong to subject farm animals to cloning methods.

People believe that food from cloned animals could result in 'timebomb' diseases - such as BSE in cattle and CJD in humans - which might not show up for years, research for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) revealed.

They feel the food would be of little value to consumers and the only people to benefit would be the biotech companies, farmers and retailers.

Although no such food is currently on the market in the UK the emphatic rejection by consumers will be seen as a reminder to supermarkets and the farming industry of the daunting task they face should they attempt to introduce it.

The FSA, responsible for food safety, wanted to gauge public attitudes to food such as meat, milk, cheese and eggs from cloned animals because it thinks there will eventually be an application to sell the food in Britain.



Food of the future? Futi was cloned from a South African milk cow in Brits, South Africa

Under current laws it cannot be sold before its safety has been assessed and approved by every EU country but there are currently no clear rules surrounding the offspring of cloned animals.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) released draft guidance earlier this year in which it said foods from cloned pigs and cattle were essentially identical to those from conventionally bred animals.

EFSA said there were health and welfare issues, but these were likely to diminish as technology progressed and it is to release a fuller report in the summer.

The US government ruled in January that food from cloned animals can be produced and sold because it is unlikely to affect human health.

The FSA commissioned Creative Research to set up focus groups, broadly representative of the population, in all four home countries to discuss attitudes to the food should it become available.

The research revealed that the vast majority were against its introduction and probably wouldn't buy it if it appeared in supermarkets.

Their main concern was that it wouldn't be safe and could lead to outbreaks of new human diseases.

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Although they accepted farmers giving a helping hand to nature through techniques such as artificial insemination, they believed cloning interfered with nature. They also worried that cloning of animals could eventually lead to human cloning.

They became more opposed to it as they learned of the high failure rate of cloning, birth defects and the short life span of clones.

All the groups felt there would have to be large scale clinical trials lasting years, careful regulation and monitoring and full traceability of the animals through the food chain and by clear labelling before they would accept food from cloned animals.

Dr Steve Griggs, the director of Creative Research, said: "The overwhelming majority of people concluded that they personally would not want to eat this type of food. And nor would they want to see this type of farming.

"The answers were consistent across all the groups in the four countries with the main concerns being a combination of safety and animal welfare."

He said initially the groups knew little about cloning but were encouraged to do their own research before entering into discussions.

"They did the research and came back with considered views - not emotional responses," said Dr Griggs. " Supermarkets would need to carry out a lot of marketing and face a hard task in convincing people to buy this type of food."

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