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Lawmakers and consumers ask FDA to delay cloning ruling

By Christopher Doering

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Food and Drug Administration should delay a decision on whether milk and meat from some cloned animals are safe to eat until additional safety studies can be conducted, a Democratic lawmaker and consumer groups said in separate statements on Tuesday.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, who chairs the U.S. House Appropriations subcommittee that oversees the Food and Drug Administration, said in a letter to FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach that there is not enough data to prove consuming products from cloned animals is safe.

"Both the House and the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committees strongly encourage the FDA to obtain more information and conduct additional studies before acting further on this issue," she said in the letter.

The \$515.7 billion bill that passed the House of Representatives late Monday directs the FDA to complete further review and analysis before issuing a final decision on cloning. A similar measure was included in the farm bill that passed in the Senate last week.

Separately, the Biotechnology Industry Organization said two of the country's largest cloning companies will announce on Wednesday a registry to allow food companies to identify where cloned animals are located in the country.

A draft ruling by the FDA last December would for the first time allow the sale of food made from cloned cattle, pigs and goats. A final decision from FDA is expected in the next few weeks.

Cloning animals involves taking the nuclei of cells from adults and fusing them into egg cells that are implanted into a surrogate mother.

At present, these products cannot be sold, and the ban remains in place until a final ruling is issued.

Advocates of livestock cloning say it will improve the quality of steaks and dairy products by propagating disease-resistant animals that can produce lean and tender meat or make more milk.

Critics contend not enough is known about the technology to ensure it is safe for humans. They also say FDA needs to address concerns over animal cruelty and ethical issues tied to the technology.

"It is much too soon for this controversial technology to be unleashed in the marketplace, especially without requiring it to be labeled," said Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch. "When it comes to cloned food, the FDA should listen to the public instead of the biotech industry."

(Reporting by Christopher Doering; Editing by Marguerita Choy)

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