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Cloning for food: “unnecessary suffering, unethical production” says Eurogroup for Animals

Eurogroup for Animals believes that cloning for food production is totally unacceptable on animal welfare and ethical grounds, and is concerned that a decision will be taken without real widespread debate. It calls on the EU to take into account the conclusions of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE) Opinion on the ethical aspects of animal cloning for food supply, adopted today.

In its conclusions, the EGE “does not see convincing arguments to justify the production of food from clones and their offspring”. The Group grounds its assumption on the current level of suffering and health problems of surrogate dams and animal clones. It also expresses its concern that intensive breeding techniques may adversely affect animal welfare and asks for a review of current practices to be conducted at European level. The Group recalls that animals are recognized as sentient beings in EU law (Amsterdam Treaty).

The EGE Opinion follows the 11 January publication by EFSA of its draft Scientific Opinion on food safety, animal health and welfare and environmental impact of animal cloning. EFSA concluded that “the health and welfare of a significant proportion of clones has been found to be adversely affected”. However, Eurogroup for Animals considers that several other important health and welfare aspects have not been considered in the Opinion and its conclusions.

In the context of the public consultation on the draft EFSA Scientific Opinion – which runs until 25 February 2008 – and following the publication of the European Group of Ethics Opinion, **it is Eurogroup’s view that:**

1. The cloning process is inefficient, wastes animals’ lives and has a huge potential to **cause pain, suffering and distress** at all stages of the process (according to EFSA figures, fewer than five per cent of cloned embryos usually survive to birth).
2. Livestock animals are already seen by some as commodities rather than **sentient beings**. Cloning would compound this view, leading to less concern for animal welfare and less willingness to address welfare issues.
3. Cloning would **greatly reduce genetic diversity** within livestock populations, increasing the chances of whole herds being wiped out by disease to which they would all be equally susceptible. Given the increased standardisation of husbandry systems, cloned animals would be considered as **identical units rather than individuals**, resulting in less human interaction with individual animals giving rise to insufficient understanding of and concern for the animals’ welfare.
4. The development of animal cloning as a method of food production is being **pursued without public awareness** and in spite of well-documented public concerns relating to the use of biotechnology in food production (e.g. GM foods).

Eurogroup for Animals therefore calls on the EU to introduce an immediate ban on the cloning and marketing of animals for food production.

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See Eurogroup for Animals’ Statement on cloning at: <http://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/documents/pdf/positionpapercloning.pdf>

Eurogroup for Animals is the federation of EU Animal Welfare organisations. It represents EU public opinion through its membership organisations across the Union and has both the scientific and technical expertise to provide authoritative advice on biotechnology issues relating to animal welfare.