

EU wants cloned meat off the table (Update)

December 18 2013, by Christian Spillmann



Cloned calf "Manuel" pictured at a stockyard in Chascomus, province of Buenos Aires, Argentina on June 30, 2009

The European Commission said Wednesday it would ban meat from cloned animals but stopped short of imposing restrictions on produce from the offspring of such animals, a hugely sensitive issue.

Animal rights groups attacked the plan as not going far enough on an

issue which has divided public opinion since the successful cloning of 'Dolly the Sheep' in the 1990s.

Critics say cloning is unnatural, causes unnecessary suffering to animals and risks dangerous unintended consequences while supporters see it as offering untold new possibilities to improve human life.

Introducing the planned rules, EU Health Commissioner Tonio Borg said the commercial cloning of farmed animals and the import of cloned animals will be banned in the 28-member bloc.

He added that the marketing of food from cloned animals would also be prohibited, but that research into cloning would be allowed.

"These proposals intend to address animal welfare and other ethical concerns related to the use of the technique," the Commission said.

However, "there is no proposal on labelling" any produce arising from the offspring of cloned animals, be it milk or meat, said Borg.

The only country cloning animals as a food source within the European Union is Denmark.

While cloned meat is not often eaten because of its high price, the embryos and semen of such animals are exported and widely used.

The United States, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay are among countries that farm the offspring of cloned animals.

Although the European Union imports between 300,000 and 500,000 tonnes of beef from the United States and Argentina, they are not required to specify the origin of the meat with specific labelling.

A move by European Parliament lawmakers to impose clear labelling on imported meat fell apart in 2011 over opposition from member states, which deemed such a regulation excessive.

Any such regulation would have required the United States and Argentina to carry out checks on meat sources, and risked sparking a trade war in case of non-compliance.

The EU and United States are now negotiating what would be the world's biggest free trade agreement, with food safety issues and standards a major problem area as both sides seek to win greater market access for their produce.

The Commission said it considered the labelling of food from the offspring of cloned animals but decided that it would have been an overly complicated process.

"This requires that parentage information for every food producing animal is conveyed through the food production chain," it said.

"This becomes more complicated and therefore costly with every generation between the clone and the animal, reproductive material and the food," it said.

It was therefore holding off such labelling to give more time for a feasibility study to be carried out.

Reineke Hameleers, who heads the Eurogroup for Animals, criticised the Commission's proposals, saying that they did not go far enough.

Not only does the ban not come in force immediately, it also does not include a prohibition on produce from the offspring of cloned animals, Hameleers said.

The group opposes cloning on ethical, animal welfare and health grounds. It quotes scientists saying that mortality of cloned animals is considerably higher than for other animals.

The latest proposals by the European Commission will have to be put to the European Parliament and member states, and are not expected to come into force before 2016.

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