

# FDA poised to approve cloned food

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government has decided that food from cloned animals is safe to eat and does not require special labeling.

The Food and Drug Administration planned to brief industry groups in advance of an announcement Thursday morning. The FDA indicated it would approve cloned livestock in a scientific journal article published online earlier this month.

Consumer groups say labels are a must, because surveys have shown people to be uncomfortable with the idea of cloned livestock.

However, FDA concluded that cloned animals are "virtually indistinguishable" from conventional livestock and that no identification is needed to judge their safety for the food supply.

"Meat and milk from clones and their progeny is as safe to eat as corresponding products derived from animals produced using contemporary agricultural practices," FDA scientists Larisa Rudenko and John C. Matheson wrote in the Jan. 1 issue of Theriogenology.

Labels should only be used if the health characteristics of a food are

significantly altered by how it is produced, said Barb Glenn of the Biotechnology Industry Organization.

"The bottom line is, we don't want to misinform consumers with some sort of implied message of difference," Glenn said. "There is no difference. These foods are as safe as foods from animals that are raised conventionally."

Critics of cloning say the verdict is still out on the safety of food from cloned animals.

"Consumers are going to be having a product that has potential safety issues and has a whole load of ethical issues tied to it, without any labeling," said Joseph Mendelson, legal director of the Center for Food Safety.

Carol Tucker Foreman, director of food policy at the Consumer Federation of America, said the FDA is ignoring research that shows cloning results in more deaths and deformed animals than other reproductive technologies.

The consumer federation will ask food companies and supermarkets to refuse to sell food from clones, she said.

"Meat and milk from cloned ani-

mals have no benefit for consumers, and consumers don't want them in their foods," Foreman said.

The FDA scientists wrote that by the time clones reached 6 to 18 months of age, they were virtually indistinguishable from conventionally bred animals.

Final approval of cloned animals for food is months away; the FDA will accept comments from the public after issuing a draft risk assessment on Thursday.

Those in favor of the technology say it would be used primarily for breeding and not for steak or pork tenderloin.

Cloning lets farmers and ranchers make copies of exceptional animals, such as pigs that fatten rapidly or cows that are superior milk producers.

"It's not a genetically engineered animal; no genes have been changed or moved or deleted," Glenn said. "It's simply a genetic twin that we can then use for future matings to improve the overall health and well-being of the herd."

Thus, consumers would mostly get food from their offspring and not the clones themselves, Glenn said.

Still, some clones would eventually end up in the food supply. As with conventional livestock, a cloned bull or cow that outlived its usefulness would probably wind up at a hamburger plant, and a cloned dairy cow would be milked during her breeding years.

That's unlikely to happen soon, because FDA officials have asked farmers and cloning companies since 2001 to voluntarily keep clones and their offspring out of the food supply. The informal ban would remain in place for several months while FDA accepts comments from the public.

Approval of cloned livestock has taken five years because of pressure from big food companies nervous that consumers might reject milk and meat from cloned animals.

To produce a clone, the nucleus of a donor egg is removed and replaced with the DNA of a cow, pig or other animal. A tiny electric shock coaxes the egg to grow into a copy of the original animal. Cloning companies say it's just another reproductive technology, such as artificial insemination, yet there can be differences between the two because of chance and environmental influences.

# State reports first flu related death

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment confirmed the state's first influenza cases of the 2006-2007 season.

KDHE laboratories have confirmed four cases of the flu - three from south central Kansas and one from northeast Kansas.

Two of the cases were confirmed in children under the age of 5 and two cases were in Kansans between the ages of 5 and 24.

In addition, KDHE has received the first reported death associated with influenza. The re-

ported flu death was in an individual from south central Kansas over the age of 70.

Kansas is now reporting sporadic influenza activity to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) based on recent increased reports of influenza-like illness from sentinel sites and laboratory confirmation of isolates (samples taken by health care providers that show preliminary positive results) from the south central and northeast regions of the state.

# Judge refuses charges

WICHITA (AP) — Outgoing Attorney General Phill Kline is handing his case against the state's most visible abortion provider over to a special prosecutor, but no criminal charges are pending against Dr. George Tiller.

For the second time in six days,

Sedgwick County District Judge Paul W. Clark concluded that Kline didn't have the authority to file charges against Tiller because District Attorney Nola Foulston didn't consent to it. Foulston said that if Tiller is to be prosecuted, her office will do it.

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