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Cloned-food inquiry brings flood of input

By Rob Waters and Justin Blum
Bloomberg News

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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has received 30,500 comments on a proposal by the agency to allow food made from cloned animals to be sold to the public.

The FDA is reviewing the issue and isn't ready to say when it will announce a final rule or livestock, FDA spokeswoman Julie Zawisza said in an interview. A decision could come soon. Melissa Schwartz, a spokeswoman for Sen. Barbara Mikulski, a Maryland Democrat who has objections to cloned food.

The agency proposed a year ago to allow products made from cloned animals and their offspring onto the market based on a four-year review showing they are as safe to eat as items made from naturally born animals. The proposal drew opposition from consumer and food industry groups as well as lawmakers.

Last month, the Senate passed a measure that would bar the FDA from approving the proposal until it conducts further study of the potential health effects.

The legislation also would require the Agriculture Department to examine consumer acceptance of cloned meats. The amendment was part of the Senate's \$286 billion farm bill. The House version of the bill didn't have a provision on the issue.

Previously, the FDA had said it would have a ruling by the end of last year. Mikulski sent a letter in December to FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach telling him not to "pull a fast one" making a decision on cloned foods without conducting additional studies sought by lawmakers.

Cloning has fascinated the public and inflamed debate. Scottish scientists announced in 1997 that they had succeeded in making a genetic copy of a sheep. They named that offspring Dolly. Concerns about the safety of eating cloned animal products as well as animal cruelty arose in part because Dolly, suffering from an incurable lung disease, was euthanized while still young.

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