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Foes decry clone ruling

By Elizabeth Weise, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Consumer and animal rights advocates condemned the Food and Drug Administration's announcement Tuesday that meat and milk from cloned cattle, pigs and goats is safe for the American public to eat and drink.

Animal rights groups argue that cloning is cruel because it works only in a small percentage of attempts and is stressful for the animals involved. Some consumer groups say there isn't sufficient scientific proof that these foods are safe, despite seven years of FDA research.

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The groups opposed ranged from Farm Sanctuary — whose spokeswoman, Natalie Bowman, called the FDA decision "appallingly irresponsible" — and the American Anti-Vivisection Society to Consumers Union and the Consumer Federation of America.

"In the face of ever-increasing food safety concerns, it is troubling to see the FDA approval of products from cloned animals to be sold to the public, when questions surrounding the health risks, legal implications and ethical concerns remain unanswered," says Tom Buis, president of the National Farmers Union. "Furthermore, there is no data to suggest any consumer demand for such products."

The FDA stood firm. Stephen Sundlof, director of the agency's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, said there are no safety concerns.

This month, the European Union came to the same tentative conclusion, although it hasn't made a final decision. Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Japan are studying the question.

The FDA is asking for a voluntary moratorium on the sale of meat and milk from cloned animals during a "transition" period of unspecified length to allow food producers to work out sale parameters and labeling.

It's unlikely that many consumers will encounter products made from clones. There are only 600 cloned livestock in the USA, about 570 of which are cattle, says Bruce Knight, undersecretary for marketing and regulatory programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Because cloning costs \$6,000 to \$15,000 for each live birth, depending on the species, it is rare, says Greg Jaffe of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Science in the Public Interest. "The clones are going to a minuscule portion of the food supply. What's going to be on people's dinner plates is their offspring."

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