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Consumer backlash over FDA Intentions on Food From Cloned Animals

WASHINGTON - A coalition of consumer, environmental and animal welfare organisations has submitted more than 130,000 comments to the Food and Drug Administration from consumers who oppose the Agency's proposed plan to introduce food from cloned animals into the US food supply.

The Center for Food Safety, Consumers Union, Food and Water Watch, The Humane Society of the United States, the American Anti-Vivisection Society, the Consumer Federation of America and the Organic Consumers Association joined together to send a strong, unified message to the FDA that the public opposes the introduction of cloned animals in food.

Today is the last day of a public comment period that began in January in response to FDA's proposal to allow products from cloned animals in the food supply unlabeled. Members of the meat and dairy industries, and several nonprofit organizations urged the Agency to take time to consider comments from the widest possible sample of Americans in consideration of the untested nature of cloning technology.

Recent public opinion polls show the majority of the American public does not want milk or meat from cloned animals in their food. A December 2006 poll by the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology found that nearly two-thirds of U.S. consumers were uncomfortable with animal cloning. The comments submitted today strongly reinforce this national sentiment.

"Food from cloned animals has no place on our supermarket shelves or on our dinner tables," said Andrew Kimbrell, Executive Director of the Center for Food Safety. "FDA needs to heed consumer concerns and ban animal clones in food."

Another controversial aspect of FDA's plan is that labeling of any kind on meat or milk products from clones or their offspring would not be required. This would rob Americans of their right to choose what they eat and feed their families.

"More than 130,000 people have said 'No' to unlabeled food from clones," said Ronnie Cummins of the Organic Consumers Association. "People are tired of the biotech industry meddling in the food system, tired of government rubber-stamping approvals, and tired of not having the right to choose what they eat and feed to their families."

"This flood of public comments should send a strong signal to FDA that the public is not ready for food from animal clones, and if such food is put on the market they want it labeled" said Michael Hanson of Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of Consumer Reports, and author of CU's scientific critique of FDA's risk assessment. "We hope the agency will listen and rethink their proposal in light of public sentiment and the many unanswered questions about the science of animal cloning."

Citing animal welfare concerns, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) have also asked the FDA to block sales of products from cloned farm animals and their offspring.

"Animals who go through the cloning process suffer terribly. Death and deformities in cloned animals is the norm, not the exception," said Tracie Letterman, Executive Director



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In its risk assessment of cloned food, the FDA claims to have evaluated extensive peer reviewed studies on the safety of food from clones to support its conclusion, yet a recent report issued by the Center for Food Safety, Not Ready for Prime Time, shows the assessment only references three peer-reviewed food safety studies, all of which focus on the narrow issue of milk from cloned cows. What is even more disturbing is that these studies were partially funded by the same biotech firms that produce clones for profit. None of the studies focus on the safety of meat from cloned cows or pigs, or milk or meat from the offspring of cloned animals, and there was absolutely no data on milk or meat from cloned goats - all major issues critical to determining the safety of the proposal.

"FDA's willingness to allow the sale of meat and milk from cloned animals is yet another example of the Agency's disregard for safety in the face of industry pressure," said Wenonah Hauter, Executive Director of Food & Water Watch. "The FDA should not be allowed to use a skimpy body of evidence to allow this controversial product onto consumers' dinner tables."

Proponents of animal cloning have asserted that the technology will lead to better and less expensive dairy and meat products, but Chris Waldrop, Director of the Food Policy Institute at the Consumer Federation of America says this simply isn't true, "Consumers don't want or need cloned animals for food. Cloning will not produce safer or cheaper milk and meat. Having cloned cows produce more milk won't reduce milk prices. U.S. farmers already produce more milk than we drink and the government is required to buy the surplus. Since 1999, dairy support programs have cost taxpayers over \$5 billion."

The FDA has said it will review all the public comments, and will likely make a decision on food from cloned animals by the end of the year.

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