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HEADLINE: Safety of clones' milk, meat debated

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BODY:

Rockville, Md. --- A **Food and Drug Administration** report saying **cloned animal** milk and meat are safe is not conclusive, half of the 10-member Veterinary Medicine Advisory Committee said Tuesday.

The committee met at an **FDA** public hearing to discuss the report, released last Friday, which stated that such products were safe to consume.

Committee members said that they needed more information to decide whether consuming cloned animal products was safe.

The hearing also gave consumer groups a chance to comment on the FDA report.

"The risk assessment [report] is characterized by a lack of hard data all the way through the presentation," said Carol Tucker Foreman, director of food policy at the Consumer Federation of America in an interview. "The information on milk is only based on one study."

The agency's 11-page draft report found that milk and meat from cloned animals were safe to consume, based on initial research.

Because cloning is a new technology, researchers had to rely on limited data from biotechnology companies.

"It's unlikely that any company would give them data that cloning isn't safe," said Foreman.

Dolly, a sheep, became the first mammal cloned from an adult cell in 1996. Only a few hundred cloned cattle exist in the United States.

The report compared cloned cows, sheep, pigs and goats to current FDA standards for their conventional animal counterparts.

Problems with cloned animals mostly occur during pregnancy or birth.

But animals with visible health problems such as deformities weren't studied because they wouldn't enter the food supply, as with all animals. The ones that outlast early problems are likely to be healthy.

However, consumers still worry about the safety of scientifically tampering with food. Fifty-five percent of Americans would avoid buying genetically modified food if it were labeled, according to a July ABC News survey.

Consumers are willing to pay up to \$1.50 more for milk labeled free of artificial growth hormones and \$3 more for organic milk, according to a study by the Food Research Group.

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