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**FDA Week**

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**HEADLINE:** FDA TO CONSIDER MORALS, ETHICS IN ANIMAL CLONING POLICY

**BODY:**

FDA plans to ask the public what moral and ethical issues it should consider in its upcoming draft risk assessment on using the offspring of clones in food, according to FDA Commissioner Lester Crawford. Crawford said FDA will soon submit its draft risk assessment to a peer-reviewed journal.

Crawford spoke Monday at a food policy conference in Washington sponsored by the Consumer Federation of America.

Panelists said moral and ethical questions will likely play a larger role than food safety or animal welfare in the debate over whether to allow animal cloning as a breeding technology. Many studies have shown that meat from the offspring of cloned animals is nearly identical to that of conventional animals, but that does not mean people want to eat cloned meat, they say.

Carol Tucker Foreman of the Consumer Federation of America told FDA Week she is surprised that FDA plans to grapple with moral questions instead of sticking strictly to the science of the practice.

Foreman says she would prefer that FDA steer clear of moral considerations. She supports tackling ethical considerations before allowing clones in the food supply, but she thinks an independent government advisory panel should deal with it instead. If no one grapples with the matter, FDA likely will deal with moral questions under the guise of science, she says, as FDA has done with the emergency contraceptive Plan B.

FDA has continually postponed a decision on Barr Lab's application to move Plan B from prescription to over-the-counter status.

Autumn Fiester of Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania said that several surveys have shown over the years that the majority of Americans and Europeans oppose eating cloned animals or their progeny.

However, it is difficult to say exactly why they oppose it, Fiester said. Respondents indicate that cloning crosses an invisible line they are uncomfortable with. People are much more comfortable with genetically engineering plants than sentient beings, she said.

Fiester divides opposition into two camps. One group, which is generally religious, feels that cloning animals is tantamount to "playing God." The other group dislikes the "objectification" of animals, she said. Americans increasingly are uncomfortable with the way farm animals are treated as "things," she says, and cloning takes this objectification one step further.

Biotechnology industry sources last week said the draft risk assessment, to be included in a draft guidance, likely will signal FDA's intention to neither require special labels on the milk, meat and eggs from the progeny of cloned animals nor to regulate the practice any differently than conventional reproductive technology (See FDA Week, Sept. 16).

It is unclear how the moral and ethical considerations could affect FDA's cloning policy. The risk assessment will deal only with animals that have not been genetically altered.

Animal cloning is expected to be used alongside other technologies. Scientists are developing transgenic animals for animal models, xenotransplantation and proteins used in pharmaceuticals.

Crawford said it is unclear which journal will review and publish the risk assessment. The journal Science published the agency's last paper on food biotechnology.

Crawford emphasized that FDA is not going to lift the voluntary ban on using clones for food when it releases the draft risk assessment. The dairy industry had worried FDA would lift the ban upon release of its draft assessment.

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