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## Goodbye Dolly: Up From Sheep to Cloned Horses

By [ANDREW POLLACK](#)

Royal Blue Boon was a champion and big money-earner in the equine calf-herding sport known as cutting. Comes now her genetic knock-off: Royal Blue Boon Too, whose birth last month was, her creators say, the start of commercial horse cloning.

The births of Too and the clone of a second star cutting mare, Tap O Lena, were announced yesterday by two Texas companies — ViaGen, a cloning company, and Encore Genetics, a horse-breeding and marketing company. Seven more clones of champion horses are scheduled to be born this year, the companies said.

While there have been at least three horses cloned before this, the companies portrayed the new ones as the first commercially cloned horses, though a French company played at least some role in earlier clones.

The companies are charging \$150,000 for the first clone and \$90,000 for a second clone of the same animal. Clones are genetic copies of the original, though they might not be the same in all details because the environment influences how genes act.

ViaGen is hoping that horses can ride to the rescue of the cloning business. The cloning of cows and pigs, which could be a bigger business, has been set back by the [Food and Drug Administration](#), which has yet to make a ruling that the milk and meat of cloned animals, and their more conventionally bred offspring, are safe to consume.

"We see horses as being an achievable business now that doesn't have a regulatory process associated with it," Mark Walton, the chief executive of ViaGen, said in an interview.

The F.D.A. decision on food safety, which is bound to be controversial, was rumored to be coming last fall but was put off, and it is not clear when it will come.

In the meantime, the F.D.A. has asked owners of cloned animals to keep the meat and milk out of the food supply. Some farmers and breeders who have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in cloning their prized livestock have thus had to pour milk down the drain or store semen in vats, unable to sell it.

Even though horses do not present a food safety issue, at least in this country, horse cloning is still somewhat controversial. The Humane Society of the United States issued a statement yesterday criticizing the two Texas companies for "subjecting horses to commercial exploitation through cloning," which it said had no "legitimate social value." It said there was a high failure rate in cloning and that clones could have birth defects and illnesses.

Mr. Walton said the two clones ViaGen made, both born on a farm in Purcell, Okla., appeared to be healthy.

Some people in the horse world are also wary of cloning, in part because they think conventional breeding is better for the future of the horses and sports. The [Jockey Club](#), which is in charge of registration of thoroughbred racehorses, does not allow cloning. The same is true for the American Quarter Horse Association.

But the National Cutting Horse Association has no such prohibition, according to a statement from an official. Cutting is an event in which a horse and rider separate a single calf from its herd and then block the calf from returning.

Royal Blue Boon won more than \$380,000 in her career and her offspring, including Red White and Boon, Autumn Boon and Peptoboonsmal, have won more than \$2.5 million more. She is now 26, past her cutting and reproductive years, so her owner, Elaine Hall of Weatherford, Tex., decided to have her cloned.

"The motivation for me to do it in the first place was to be able to preserve the superior genes that my mare has," Ms. Hall said in a telephone press conference organized by ViaGen.

ViaGen, based in Austin, is controlled by John Sperling, an octogenarian billionaire who started the profit-making University of Phoenix. He has put his money into other causes as well, like the attempted cloning of his own dog and other pets, anti-aging research, and the decriminalization of marijuana, particularly for medical uses.