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Omaha World-Herald

Omaha World-Herald (Nebraska)

October 18, 2006 Wednesday
Metro Edition

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 01A

LENGTH: 565 words

HEADLINE: Meat, milk of clones may reach consumer Research suggests no health risk Public to weigh in

BYLINE: Joe Ruff, WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

BODY:

Serving "Dolly" the cloned sheep at Easter dinner might seem like a stretch.

But the federal government appears poised to permit marketing of milk and meat from **cloned animals** bred for their exceptional milk production or other attributes.

By the end of the year, a draft risk assessment and proposed risk management plan could be released for animal clones, their offspring, and meat and milk from the animals, the Food and Drug Administration said in a statement Tuesday. A public comment period would follow.

"The draft risk assessment includes scientific studies that show that the meat and milk from cattle clones and their offspring are as safe as that from conventionally bred animals," the FDA said.

The agency commented after the Washington Post disclosed the timeline and some details of the studies Tuesday.

The newspaper reported that the offspring of conventional and cloned boars were raised identically at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Neb., so the meat could be studied at an independent lab.

The director of the animal research center, Mohammad Koohmaraie, said scientists there artificially inseminated sows and slaughtered the offspring as part of the study.

Animal cloning came to the public's attention in 1996 with the birth of the first mammal clone, Dolly the

sheep. Scientists have expanded the technique to cattle, horses, pigs, goats and other mammals.

Several consumer, religious and animal welfare groups opposed to the marketing of products from cloned animals, including the Center for Food Safety in Washington, D.C., filed a petition last Thursday calling on the FDA to enact a moratorium on such foods while more study is done.

The FDA has asked clone producers and livestock breeders to voluntarily refrain from introducing food products from clones or their offspring into the food supply.

Whether people would buy cloned food products is another question.

"I wouldn't want that," Jackie Loth, 64, said Tuesday as she left No Frills Supermarket at 3026 S. 24th St.

"It's bad enough the way it is now, with pesticides and herbicides," Loth said. "So what are they going to do, make more of it?"

The FDA has discussed not labeling cloned products because they cannot be distinguished from conventional meat and milk, said Carole Tucker Foreman, director of food policy at the Consumer Federation of America.

However, surveys indicate about 60 percent of Americans would not buy products from cloned animals, and about two-thirds of the public feel cloning is immoral, Foreman said.

Given that kind of public resistance, the FDA might be convinced that labeling would be a good idea, Foreman said.

Meat and milk from cloned animals might be safe, Foreman said, but the FDA has not shared the details of its studies.

The Washington Post said farmers and companies that have been growing cloned barnyard animals from single cells in anticipation of a lucrative market say cloning will bring consumers a level of consistency and quality impossible to attain with conventional breeding, making perfectly marbled beef and reliably lean and tasty pork the norm.

But animal cloning, for many people, also raises the specter of human cloning, Foreman said.

"I think it's a mistake to ignore what is the elephant in the room," Foreman said. "Are we going to allow a market in cloned animals just because someone can have a marbled steak?"

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