

Cloning ban should also apply to imports

Written by Daciana Octavia Sârbu on 11 June 2015 in Opinion
Opinion

New EU rules on cloning animals for food must reflect citizens' concerns, argues Daciana Octavia Sârbu.



Consumer research is pretty conclusive: Europeans do not want cloning to be used in their food production.

Five years on from the collapse of all-night negotiations on cloning laws, we have 'new' proposals on the table, but it is still difficult to convince the council and commission that these laws should reflect citizens' concerns.

The legislation currently under discussion faces a number of challenges, the first of which concerns its legal basis.

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MEPs have rejected the European commission's attempt to side-line parliament through the so-called 'consent' procedure, where parliament would have had no opportunity to amend the legislation on food from cloned animals.

The co-rapporteurs' decision to change the legal basis in order to allow parliament to have its full say could yet still be challenged by national governments in council and by the commission, but MEPs were not prepared to just sit there and watch while their rights as co-legislators were bypassed.

The second challenge concerns the scope of the legislation. So far, the signs are pointing to MEPs supporting an extension of the scope to include the descendants of cloned animals.

Limiting the scope of the legislation to just clones will not stop the demand for more cloning. Their descendants also carry the 'desirable' genes which were intentionally copied during the cloning process.

Selling them merely encourages more cloning, further establishing a practice which as the evidence suggests, is against the will of most people.

Both council and commission have always argued for a very limited scope, and one of the reasons for this relates to another big challenge for this legislation - trade issues.

Some of our international partners are already cloning animals for food production and exporting the products of this process, and we are buying them. It is inconsistent to oppose the use of a cruel - and unnecessary - technique at home, and then import products resulting from this very process happening elsewhere.

We should insist that imports comply with the same high standards the EU has established for food safety and animal welfare.

The other two institutions may well be nervous about facing up to our trade partners, but the EU is the world's biggest single market.

Surely this gives us the clout we need to protect our producers from imports which don't comply with the high standards our citizens expect and deserve?

One such standard is the EU's emphasis on the precautionary principle. While it is true that the European food safety authority has found no reason to doubt the safety of food from clones, it is important to remember that the evidence these conclusions are based on is relatively small.

In addition, cloning is a recent invention therefore its long-term effects on food production are still unknown. It would seem sensible then to apply the precautionary principle - especially given that doing so would lead to laws on cloning which are in tune with public opinion.

About the author

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (RO) is parliament's S&D group shadow rapporteur on the cloning of animals for farming purposes

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