Resolution on the cloning of animals for food supply

2008/2598(RSP) - 03/09/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 2 September 2008, the European Parliament adopted by 622 votes to 32 with 25 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on the cloning of animals for food supply.

It called on the Commission to submit proposals prohibiting:

- the cloning of animals for food supply purposes ;
- the farming of cloned animals or their offspring;
- the placing on the market of meat or dairy products derived from cloned animals or their offspring and the importing of cloned animals, their offspring, semen and embryos from cloned animals or their offspring, and meat or dairy products derived from cloned animals or their offspring.

Parliament pointed out that cloning processes show low rates of survival for transferred embryos and cloned animals, with many cloned animals dying in the early stages of life from cardiovascular failure, immuno-deficiencies, liver failure, respiratory problems, and kidney and musculoskeletal abnormalities. The mortality and morbidity of clones are higher than in sexually produced animals and late pregnancy losses and disorders are likely to affect the welfare of surrogate mothers. Given current levels of suffering and health problems of surrogate dams and animal clones the European Group on Ethics questions whether cloning animals for food is ethically justified and does not see convincing arguments to justify food production from clones and their offspring.

Parliament also pointed out that cloning would significantly reduce genetic diversity within livestock populations, increasing the possibility of whole herds being decimated by diseases to which they are susceptible. While the principal purpose of cloning is to produce multiple copies of animals with fast growth rates or high yields, traditional selective breeding has already led to leg disorders and cardiovascular malfunction in fast-growing pigs, and lameness, mastitis and premature culling in high-yielding cattle. Cloning the fastest-growing and highest-yielding animals will lead to even higher levels of health and welfare problems.

Lastly, and in addition to the fact that the implications of the cloning of animals for food supply have not been adequately studied, cloning poses a serious threat to the image and substance of the European agricultural model, which is based on product quality, environment-friendly principles and respect for stringent animal welfare conditions.