

Cloning Animals For Food In Poor Taste

Chris Collie
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WATERLOO, O.N. (CUP) -- It's fascinating how concepts presented within not-so-distant science fiction love to become science fact. A great and recent example of this is animal cloning. Right now, massive pressure is being placed on American federal regulators by private interests to approve and legitimize the cloning of farm animals for human consumption.

These interests have argued that milk or meat products from a cloned cow should be available for sale alongside those from regular, non-cloned animals. Interestingly enough, no law currently prevents them from being distributed within the US. And this one took me by surprise: they already have the cloned animals ready to go. In a very real sense, science snuck up on legislators, and the public as well.

But because these private interests always play nice, of course, companies such as the Austin, Texas-based ViaGen have voluntarily withheld all cloned animals until federal approval for their distribution is received, which isn't looking far off.

In fact, according to an article in the Portsmouth Herald, as far back as 2002 the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was already on track to release a National Academy of Science report it commissioned, stating that food derived from cloned animals poses no safety concern to humans, and therefore should be deemed appropriate for sale.

That report was scrapped in its final hour, but is rumored to be making a re-appearance within the next few months, causing all the recent media attention. Meanwhile, Canada is also looking into the idea of legitimizing cloned animal products, with a paper slated for release from Health Canada this fall discussing the matter.

The University of Guelph is currently performing a long-term study on seven cloned cows.

One should be rather confident that concerns regarding human safety are not the main issue holding up all of this cloning business though, as firms like ViaGen

would have you believe. The main snag is negative public perception of the idea -- what some of these firms call the "gross factor."

The idea of cloning in general frightens people. Knowing that we have the power to make a genetically identical copy of a living being has already been tough enough for the public to accept, never mind the idea of eating one for dinner.

If public safety was really the main concern when it comes to approving new methods of food production in North America, the US and Canada would never have allowed the massive infiltration of genetically modified ingredients into our food system without a more stringent approval process and study period.

According to a panel of experts at the Royal Society of Canada who were mentioned in a recent Globe and Mail piece, the approval process in this country for genetically modified foods was extremely flawed. Not to mention the fact that most of the country had no idea this even took place.

Currently, about 75 per cent of the processed foods Canadians eat are likely to contain genetically modified ingredients, with none of them labeled, even as the long term effects of such foods are still undetermined.

It's being presented that the human consumption of such materials is safe, even when the animals themselves are being plagued by damaging health problems. These include weakened immune systems leading to an increased need for antibiotics, the development of arthritis at an earlier age alongside other premature aging, heart and breathing problems, deformities, and obesity.

These are all terribly frightening, yet they will not be the main reason if cloned foods don't get approved in Canada. Only this pesky public perception issue can sour the deal now. That is, if it makes it to the national level, unlike genetically modified foods which were stealthily approved. They are now an institutionalized aspect of our nation's food manufacturing system, and won't be going anywhere soon. And if cloned animal products do get the nod, neither will they.

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available. Furthermore, what does the SU Executive and the General Manager mean by the right information. If it is a simple break down of some numbers or an clear explanation of why a given sum of money went to a given location, that would be one thing, but I fear that this information is rather a "proper" way of interpreting the budget. Do they understand the needs of regular students better than the rest of the student body? This would mean that the SU Executive basically controls the access to information. Put in another way, how do we know the information is unbiased when there is a lack in transparency even if the document was ratified by council. In addition, while most students will not be interested in knowing about the budget, some will and it is not feasible for the VP of Finance to spend a lot of time repeating explanations to students over and over again as he is busy with the rest of his duties.

The budget itself is a working document, meaning it is subject to change any time throughout the year, this is one of the reason's the budget is not made public. Also, it says in the constitution that the VP of Finance and GM will review the budget with students. But how is anyone supposed to know whether or not a change in the budget is possible. Say for example students wanted to start a new student program that they think would make life better on campus, anything at all. Students will not be able to raise the necessary money by themselves, they will need SU support. So if a group of students were considering starting a new major activity or program for students how would they know whether or not that action is really feasible in terms of SU finances. I think any students interested in campus activities would want to be able to have a look at the budget themselves so that they can push for a given allocation of funds or assistance with their idea. It is not the SU who should be able to decide one way or another based on this special background information. Perhaps the constitution needs a second look.

Despite the need for the proper information I guarantee that some people, student, tax-payer, citizen, even

if presented with a mountain of pertinent, detailed information, will never, ever understand the why and how of a budget, but they still have every right to it.

Representatives of unions are not elected because of higher intellectual ability or popularity or politics, they are elected because they understand the woes of the people they represent, and are responsive to their constituency. It is not in the interest of a union to put constraints on information, nor is it right for a member to be kept in the dark about the union's activities. With that it is worth mentioning that a union is an organization designed specifically to pursue the needs and desires of its members, to fight on their behalf and make decisions that promote the welfare of its members against other forces that may be directly, or indirectly marginalizing them.

Some might say that there was already a chance to debate the budget and that chance came last year at the Student Council meetings, however what happened last year is irrelevant to pushing for openness and awareness this year. We must be looking towards the future, and asking ourselves how we can improve our lives during these critical years of university life.

The Student Union has been doing a fantastic job this year for which I applaud them, they are visible, approachable, and available, both the executive and the councillors. The VP of Finance and General Manger were a great help, and I think we have a strong president. As I mentioned, the Arts Reps that I have contacted have been hugely helpful and so accommodating to my concerns. My aim is simply to build on this progress, to help create an environment of transparency and clarity within the Student Union that will reach out to students and to push towards a unified student body. Only then will we really achieve our goals here at UPEI and further them into our respective post-graduate worlds.

Thanks again

Zain Essseghaier
zain_es@hotmail.com