

Panel Discussion on Genetically Engineered Farm Animals:

The Center for Science in the Public Interest and the Center for American Progress held a panel discussion on the risks and benefits of genetically engineering (GE) farm animals on November 10, 2008, at the National Press Club. NCBA Chief Veterinarian Dr. Elizabeth Parker attended the event.

The panel consisted of: Dr. Scott Eilert PhD, Vice President and Director of the Meat Technology Department at Cargill; Dr. Michael Gregor MD, Director of Public Health and Animal Agriculture for the Humane Society of the United States; Gregory Jaffe, Director of the Biotechnology Department at the Center for Science in the Public Interest; Dr. Jamie Jonke PhD, Director of Regulatory Affairs for the National Milk Producers Federation; Dr. John Phillips, Professor Emeritus and developer of Enviropig at Guelph University; and Michael Taylor, Research Professor of Health Policy at the George Washington University School of Public Health.

Panelists discussed the myriad of issues involved with these new technologies in the context of how the next Administration and Congress should handle our continually developing food animal industries. Comments were also made in regards to what consumers should know about GE farm animals.

On a similar note, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released draft guidance on the regulation of GE animals in mid September. The guidance document is intended to clarify the FDA's regulatory authority in this field, as well as the requirements and recommendations for producers of GE animals and products derived from GE animals.

At the same time, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) sought input, through a "Request for Information" on what types of actions and approaches it should consider under the Animal Health Protection Act (AHPA) that would complement FDA's guidance.

FDA and APHIS have complimentary roles in overseeing GE animals and have been in discussions for some time regarding this issue. APHIS is tasked with protecting the health of U.S. livestock by preventing the introduction and spread of livestock diseases and pests into and within the United States. Based on that authority, APHIS may broadly consider the potential effects of animals with GE traits on the health of the overall U.S. livestock population.

NCBA appreciates their collaboration and the publication of both of these documents to begin public discussions on this topic. We believe that an open and transparent process for developing the regulatory framework regarding GE animals is important.

GE animals have new characteristics or traits introduced through their DNA, which can include increased disease and parasite resistance. This can mean fewer infections, fewer veterinary visits, fewer dietary supplements, and an overall increase in health and well-being for the animals.

Under the draft guidance, FDA will ensure that GE animal products are safe and do what they are intended to do; the documents released by both FDA and USDA are intended to ensure the health of animals and public health.

If the GE animal is a food production animal than FDA will require that the animal or

its products are proven safe to eat in order to enter the food supply. FDA intends to conduct a full food and feed safety evaluation if the animal or the product is intended for food.

Genetic engineering already is widely used in agriculture to make crops resistant to pests or herbicides. In medicine, genetic engineering is used to develop microbes that produce drugs and other therapeutic products for use in humans. In food, genetic engineering is used to produce microorganisms that aid in baking, brewing, and cheese-making.

Depending on the species of animal and its intended use, the FDA will coordinate its regulatory efforts with USDA and other federal departments and agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency.

FDA's guidance is consistent with GE biotechnology standards passed in July of this year by the Codex Alimentarius Commission- United Nations international food safety standard setting body.

NCBA is currently analyzing and evaluating the draft guidance and request for information, and believes that an open and transparent process for developing the regulatory framework is important. NCBA supports the use of new technologies that are scientifically proven and help producers raise healthy animals, and we support a strong science-based regulatory framework for GE animals.

NCBA will submit comments on the FDA's draft guidance.

Additionally, more information is available on GE animals on BIO's GE Animals Web Resource Page, available at www.bio.org. Users can view and download resource materials related to this issue including fact sheets, answers to frequently asked questions and other information.