

Cloned Beef Traced To Wisconsin Cow

BY KAREN HERZOG
McClatchy News Service

MILWAUKEE — Mark Rueth's Holstein cow Paradise had just been crowned supreme champion of the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wis., in 2000 when a biotechnology company salesman approached him ringside and offered a cut-rate deal to clone Paradise so she could "live forever," and make his farm more profitable.

The Oxford dairy farmer and cattle breeder agreed, and the salesman immediately pricked the prize cow's ear to harvest DNA.

The world of cloning hasn't exactly been paradise for Rueth in the decade since, and especially during the past two weeks. Recent headlines in the British press screamed that two male offspring of a Paradise clone were slaughtered for beef that entered the food chain. Milk from a daughter of a Paradise clone also was traced to the British food supply, setting off consumer fears about food safety.

"The English people get in an uproar about stuff," Rueth said last week, noting that a British reporter and photographer showed up unannounced at his farm. "It's not like you're manipulating or changing the DNA. Half of the DNA from the clone's offspring is from the father."

In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration doesn't regulate milk or meat from offspring of cloned animals, and doesn't require labeling. Two years after the agency concluded those food products were safe, they're in the American food supply.

However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture requests that the industry continue a voluntary moratorium on placing products from original clones in the food supply to allow trade partners in other countries to pursue their own regulations.

Offspring of clones — including the animals that are the focus of British news reports — are not subject to the voluntary moratorium, and are not identified through a U.S. program that tracks clones. The clone offspring linked to the United Kingdom's food supply were identified by the UK's Food Standards Agency.

Rueth and his partner, Nicky Reape, have gotten out of cloning because Rueth says it's too expensive, and he doesn't believe it's the most efficient way to improve his herd.

"It was popular a few years ago, but it's faded," Rueth said. Rueth's milking herd includes seven or eight offspring of Paradise clones. And he considers an award-winning daughter of a Paradise clone among the best young cows in his 200-cow herd; the father is a prize bull in Australia.

Milk from the offspring of Paradise clones is shipped to a dairy along with milk from the rest of the herd, Rueth said.

It's unclear how many offspring were produced by Paradise clones, since Rueth exported embryos to the United Kingdom and their offspring weren't officially tracked at the time.

The last Paradise clone on Rueth's farm died two years ago. Cloning is a laboratory procedure that

allows livestock breeders and others to create exact copies of elite animals. It does not change the genetic makeup of the animal.

The most common procedure is known as somatic cell nuclear transfer, which makes it possible to produce many animals from a single donor. The nucleus of a donor egg is removed and replaced with the DNA of the animal to be cloned. A tiny electric jolt stimulates cell division, creating an embryo that is a copy of the original animal. It's implanted into a surrogate mother.

Offspring of clones are produced through sexual reproduction, which means they also have genes contributed by a bull.

The FDA's conclusion that meat and milk from clones and their offspring are safe has made some Americans more comfortable with the idea, but less than half would be willing to consume it, according to the International Food Information Council, an industry-funded group that surveys 1,000 consumers annually.

The percentage of consumers "likely" to purchase meat and milk from cloned animals, given the FDA's safety determination, has increased to 48 percent in 2008 from 36 percent in 2005, when the question was asked hypothetically.

When the FDA was considering its official position on cloning, a coalition of consumer, environmental and animal rights groups petitioned for mandatory safety rules and a moratorium on foods from cloned animals. Some farmers also worried that the cloning issue could make it harder for them to sell products

overseas, as some countries already have banned U.S. beef over fears related to growth hormones.

Cloned calves also may be born with severely compromised immune systems, meaning they need large doses of antibiotics to remain healthy. That could open an avenue for large amounts of veterinary drugs to get into the human food supply, the Center for Food Safety has contended.

The chances of milk or meat from original cloned animals getting into the U.S. food supply are slim because cloned animals are costly to produce and represent the most valuable breeding stock, said Karen Batra, of the Biotechnology Industry Organization.

Batra estimated the cost of cloning an animal at about \$17,000.

While cloning preserves elite genetics, the ultimate question is whether it moves genetics forward, said Steve Larson, managing editor of Hoard's Dairyman.

"Cloning freezes you in time because you're duplicating something from the past," he said.

"From a technology standpoint, they're better these days at cloning," said Bryan Renk, executive director of the Wisconsin business group BioForward. "But cloning is still pretty expensive and it's not efficient."

Rueth said he's tired of talking about cloning, but he doesn't regret his foray into the technology.

"I'm glad we tried it. It was something unique, and it helped us expand our herd a bit when we were just getting started."

AGNOTES

Ree Heights the next morning and spend the evening in Miller. The Miller community has several activities lined up for Sunday night, including a supper provided by the Miller FFA Chapter, a Fast Draw Shooting demonstration, a traveling display by the South Dakota State Historical Society and community activities at the 4-H Center.

Monday, Aug. 30, will see the wagon train traveling from Miller to Wessington. Supper with a free will donation is being planned along with entertainment by Brian Bergeleen. The wagon train will head on to Wolsey on Tuesday, Aug. 31. On Tuesday night the Wolsey Business Association, Wolsey Firefighters and Onward Wolsey organization will provide supper for all wagon train participants.

The wagon train will arrive at the State Fair in Huron on Wednesday, Sept. 1. Participants will be treated to a supper sponsored by Farm Credit Services of America and will join the State Fair's 125th Anniversary parade at 4 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 2.

For more information on the wagon train, contact Jeff Schneiderman at (605) 261-3293, Bryce Baker at (605) 773-5436, or Dennis Klein at (605) 360-3076. The wagon train is sponsored by Farm Credit Services of America.

The 125th South Dakota State Fair will run from Thursday, Sept. 2, through Monday, Sept. 6. Pannar Seeds preview night will be Wednesday, Sept. 1. For more information on events at the 2010 State Fair, contact the Fair office at 800-529-0900, visit www.sdstatefair.com, or follow the State Fair on Facebook.

Dakotafest Offers Virtual Coffee Shop

BROOKINGS— The coffee pot is full, and free, for the public who want a seat at the South Dakota State University Virtual Coffee Shop events during the 2010 Dakotafest.

Each day during the Aug. 17-19 outdoor farm show, visitors to the festival can join Extension Pesticide Education Coordinator Jim Wilson, who will host the Virtual Coffee Shop on site. Anyone with internet access also can join the conversation remotely.

Virtual Coffee Shops begin each day at 9:30 a.m. Wilson will lead discussions with guests from SDSU and the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service. The agenda includes:

- Aug. 17, Wilson and Extension Geospatial Specialist Gregg Carlson will discuss "Food versus Fuel."

- Aug. 18, Wilson and Hamlin County Extension Business Management and Marketing Educator Don Guthmiller will talk about considerations when renting your land.

- Aug. 19, Wilson will host a two-part session. The first focuses on feeding weather-damaged corn and includes insight from Extension Swine Specialist Bob Thaler. The second part will focus on livestock insurance with guest Extension Risk and Business Management Specialist Matthew Diersen.

Attendees at the Dakotafest grounds will receive free coffee during these meetings. To join online, connect to the Virtual Coffee Shop at this link:

http://sdces.sdstate.edu/ces_web/site/conferences/coffeehop/. Choose the "How to Set Up and Uselluminate Conferencing" choice on the page, then follow the instructions. The website also includes information on the agenda for each day, and links to recordings of the sessions for those who wish to review them after they conclude.

Dakotafest is held at Schilfman Farm, located just south of Mitchell at exit 332 on Interstate 90.

In addition to the Virtual Coffee Shop, SDSU staff will host pavilions that focus on seed technology, plant science, animal science, and many other facets of agriculture and education. Staffers will serve free SDSU ice cream each day at 12:30 p.m., and free water is available at the SDSU Student Union Pavilion.

After Dakotafest ends, the Virtual Coffee Shops continue. On Aug. 25, Wilson will host a special session that focuses on food, fuel, and the recent SDSU-hosted Economic Vitality Conference.

For more information, call Wilson at 605-688-4752.

POLICY PENNINGS:

Are Grain Export Embargoes Preventable?

BY DARYLL RAY
Ag Policy Analyst

Russia's Aug. 5, announcement banning grain exports, primarily wheat, sent shock waves through the grain markets. The stated cause of the embargo was the drought and unusually high temperatures being experienced in Russia's grain areas. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is quoted in an Aug. 5, New York Times article by Andrew Kramer as saying, "We need to prevent a rise in domestic food prices, we need to preserve the number of cattle and build up reserves for next year."

As a result of the heat and drought, the projection for the Russian grain harvest is 70 million tonnes, down from 97 million tonnes a year earlier—a 28 percent decline. Domestic grain consumption in Russia is about what they expect to produce this year. In addition, last year Russia exported 21.4 million tonnes and held 24 million tonnes of grain in year ending stocks.

The Russian embargo could be a boon for farmers in the U.S., where the 2009 year ending wheat stocks were 26.5 million tonnes, equal to 44 percent of production. Farmers in Australia and Argentina could also capture some of the exports that would have gone to Russia.

The reaction to the embargo has fallen into five categories: 1) delight on the part of producers in countries that hope to capture some of Russia's export customers this year, 2) discussions about global warming and the vulnerability of our food supply to unusual weather patterns, 3) the need for genetically modified crops to deal with drought and an increasing world population, 4) dismay over governmental interference in global markets, and—you may want to be sure you are sitting down for this one—5) a tentative call by the Financial Times, London, for a "strategic grain reserve to absorb shocks"

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1ae7c962-a316-11d1-8c4-00144feabdc0.html>. In this column, we want to take a pass on the first three and focus on the last two. The concern of global traders is that we will see a repeat of 2008, when there were food riots in over 25 countries and a number of countries placed restrictions on the export of grains. The concern is that such action interferes with the price signals farmers need to increase their production.

Quoting again from Kramer's New York Times article, "Kingsmill Bond, chief analyst at Troika investment bank in Moscow...said, 'grain is an emotive issue; you want to make sure you have sufficient supplies.'" When it comes to food, most world leaders will give priority to their countries' citizens over exports every time. To do otherwise is to risk a change in government, by force or by the ballot box.

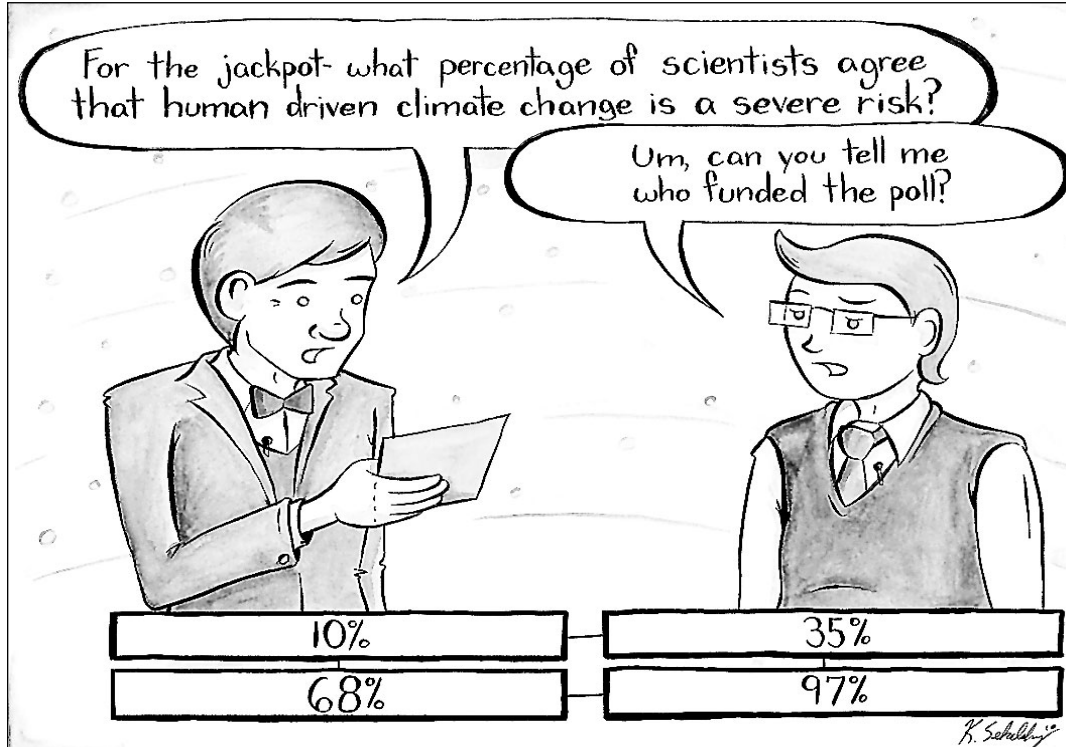
At the same time, focusing exclusively on the impact on global trade implies a belief that if grain is not available in one country, due to some problem, there will always be other countries with grain to sell. In 2008, we saw that it is possible to experience a demand surge in one major producing country and production problems in two or more countries all in the same year, resulting in tight supplies.

That brings us back to the discussion of grain reserves and their importance in ensuring a stable supply of grain when countries experience either a surge in demand or a shortfall in production. With an adequate strategic grain reserve—this may actually be a set of national grain reserves held by both major exporting and major importing nations as well as an international emergency grain reserve for food-insecure countries—prices will shift demand away from grain-short countries and toward countries with adequate supplies, thus reducing the need for embargoes.

As the Financial Times said, "the crisis of 2008 was the first...upheaval...[in grain markets in] 30 years. To face a second so soon should be a wake-up call. It would be irresponsible to expect the benign conditions of the past to return."

We don't make a practice of including links to our previous columns, but this is one of those times when we feel compelled to do so. Our column # 403, published April 18, 2009 and entitled "How to really disrupt international agricultural trade, now and in the future," discusses the inevitable trade interferences that arise from countries' universal and overpowering desire to take care of their own first. <http://www.agpolicy.org/weekcol/403.html>.

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Mexico Adds Pork To Trade Retaliation List

Last week, Mexico added pork to the list of United States products against which it is retaliating for the failure of the U.S. to live up to its obligations under the North American Free Trade Agreement to let Mexican trucks haul goods into the United States. "Mexico's retaliation against U.S. pork will have negative economic consequences for America's pork producers," said National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) president Sam Carney, a producer from Adair, Iowa.

The U.S. Congress in early March 2009 failed to renew a pilot program that allowed a limited number of Mexican trucks to haul freight into United States beyond a 25-mile commercial zone. The Cross-Border Trucking Pilot Program was started by the U.S. Department of Transportation in September 2007 as a way to begin implementing the NAFTA trucking provision, which was supposed to take effect in December 1995. In February 2001, a NAFTA dispute-settlement panel ruled that excluding Mexican trucks violat-

ed U.S. obligations under the trade deal. The ruling gave Mexico the right to retaliate against U.S. products, which it did in March 2009, placing higher tariffs on more than \$2.4 billion of U.S. goods. Pork was not included on that initial retaliation list.

"Mexico is a top market for all kinds of U.S. exports, providing millions of jobs to U.S. workers," Carney said. "The retaliation puts thousands of agricultural jobs at risk, including, now, pork industry jobs, and thousands of manufacturing jobs at risk."

YOUR VIEWS

Farm Runoff: Another Threat To The Gulf

BY JEFF GUNDERSON
Organics Specialist

Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service

Now that the BP oil well has been plugged, it's more urgent than ever to address the Gulf Coast "dead zone." The dead zone is a huge oxygen-starved region beneath the Gulf Coast surface, caused primarily by agricultural runoff of pesticides and fertilizers.

This seasonal phenomenon usually covers about 5,300 square miles, but in 2008 the zone erupted to cover 8,000 square miles — an area the size of Massachusetts. Fish and other marine life must flee the zone or perish.

Even before BP's massive oil spill, many Gulf fisheries had already declined or disappeared because of the dead zone.

The Mississippi River is the main conduit for the harmful pesticides and fertilizers. The river gathers water from all or parts of 31 states, and it carries an average annual load of 1.65 million metric tons of nitrogen/phosphorus to the Gulf from farms, fields, yards, public parks and golf courses.

The Upper Mississippi River basin includes southern Minnesota, most of Iowa and parts of Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Missouri. These states account for only 15 percent of the river's drainage basin, but discharge more than 50 percent of the nitrogen that runs to the Gulf.

Those of us who live in Mississippi River states must do whatever possible to improve the river's water quality. A range of initiatives aimed at keeping fertilizers and pesticides out of groundwater runoff must be deployed.

A 2008 report issued by the National Research Council of the National Academies, sponsored by the McKnight Foundation, took a careful look at all of the factors adversely affecting water quality in the Mississippi River. The report points to runoff from agricultural land as the primary culprit.

Organic farming is crucial for reducing this runoff.

Organic farming methods, including the use of crop rotation and cover crops, help to improve soil composition, locking nitrogen and other dead-zone nutrients in the ground around plants instead of releasing them in runoff. Organic farmers deploy buffer and filter areas to reduce runoff and erosion. Organic farmers also avoid commercial pesticides and fertilizers, reducing the toxic load that ends up in the Gulf of Mexico.

In short, converting more Midwestern agriculture acres to organic production will help ecosystems and economies downstream.

That help has never been needed more than now. The combination of the BP oil spill and the ongoing runoff of pesticides and fertilizers may be too much for the Gulf ecosystem to handle.

Each of us can take a few simple steps to save that ecosystem.

Reduce or eliminate use of commercial fertilizers and pesticides. Buy organic produce at the store. Purchase directly from organic growers at farmers' markets. Participate in community-supported agriculture, whereby you pay a farmer at the beginning of the season for produce, and the farmer delivers to you regularly at a central location.

These modest contributions will make a difference. We can't allow the Gulf to be destroyed.

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