

Calgary Herald
January 23, 2004

Mad scientist disease

EDITORIAL

It's hard to imagine a more colossal waste of time and money than the pursuit of cloning a cow that's immune to mad cow disease. Several research teams are attempting the cloning process, with a Korean group claiming four mad-cow-proof calves were born in December.

First, the money spent on cloning would be better and more cheaply spent testing every head of cattle for the disease, for that is the only way to ensure a safe supply of meat. And second, there are a whole new set of uncertainties associated with consuming cloned animals.

Remember Dolly? The world's first cloned sheep was plagued with premature aging and related health problems, and died young.

The biggest concern right now for the cattle industry is the use of sick animals for human consumption. With all the health problems that so far have plagued clones, it is doubtful one could find many people who'd want to risk eating one. Consumers, increasingly wary about eating genetically modified wheat, aren't likely to take a chance on GM meat.

Far from being the promised salvation of the beef industry, as the researchers claim, the emergence of genetically engineered cattle is more likely to hasten the industry's downfall. Also, eradicating BSE would entail the cloning of clones of other clones with the resultant weakening of the gene pool and the alarming scenario of herds of genetically identical cattle grazing in hundreds of pastures.

Mike McBane, national co-ordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition, asserts there is only one way to eliminate mad cow disease: "It's called letting cows, which are herbivores, eat grass." Even those who don't accept the no-ruminant position agree BSE-resistant cattle strategy is a long way from realistically helping solve this crisis.

Calgary Herald Editorial Board