

Offspring of clones in food chain leaves EU in bind

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Hungarian Minister of Agriculture Rural Development Sandor Fazekas gives a press conference during the European environment ministers council meeting in Brussels on March 14. A new law regulating access for the first time for offspring of cloned animals to meat markets in Europe is heading for the dustbin, the European Union's current chair said Thursday.

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A string of "Frankenfood" scares following the emergence of "non-traceable offspring" in the food chain in Britain and elsewhere lies behind an unusually hard line from the [European Parliament](#) -- but leaves gaps in legal provisions that pre-dated 1996 trailblazer [Dolly the Sheep](#) wide open.

Negotiations going back three years among the 27 states, the executive European Commission and the elected parliament that together must craft EU policy collapsed in acrimony after nine-hour overnight talks, incurring the anger of farm ministers meeting in Brussels.

Parliament's rejection of legislation as drafted "would require drawing a family tree for each slice of cheese or salami, which is practically impossible," said Hungarian rural development minister Sandor Fazekas, chairing the talks.

Negotiators for the MEPs "did not have the flexibility to discuss the possibility of allowing foodstuffs from naturally conceived animals with clones among their ancestors."

He said states had agreed "the maximum possible protection of consumers with a system that is practically and legally feasible."

Anything more "would be misleading consumers and create horrendous extra cost for farmers," Fazekas added.

The states and the EU's executive maintain that a ban on the sale of naturally born offspring of cloned animals, which the parliament wants, "would result in a trade ban on beef, pork and dairy product."

They argue this would increase prices and risk retaliation by trading partners, hitting rural agricultural exports.

[Cloning](#) for research is not covered in the legislative proposals, which must be wrapped up by the end of March or go back to the drawing board.

"Last-chance conciliation" is set for March 28.

The parliament's negotiators said it was "incredible" that states were "exclusively tied to commercial trade interests" and "willing to turn a blind eye to public opinion, as well as the ethical and animal welfare problems associated with cloning."

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