

Food For Thought

Do you favor things like genetically modified food, or cloning? Do you see a connection between food-tech issues and hunger or poverty? I have a few thoughts to share on a current idea... some "Food for thought".

Have you heard that Dutch scientists are trying to perfect the cloning of muscle tissue for use as a perennial food source? This isn't cloning actual animals for slaughter, but just muscle tissue itself; the meat, as it were. Cloning replicates cells, right?, so it doesn't have to replicate entire living creatures. We can clone parts, or even parts of parts, so theoretically we could re-create just the flesh of your favorite steak, maybe a juicy sirloin or rib-eye, over and over and over, in whatever quantities we want, forever, all from just a few original cells.

The problem, as I understand it (and here I solicit the most current info from you active inter-webbers... what is the state of the science?), is that cloning muscle tissue results in a pretty unappetizing sort of meat mush, a literal "pink-slime" with no firmness or grain at all. I guess maybe this is because we can't yet grow the muscle on a skeleton-like frame, and we can't "work" it like a real animal limb for the tastes and textures that make meat so delicious. We just aren't there yet, but it seems we may be getting close... maybe an edible hamburger-like product will be available in a year or so. Are you excited?

I'm excited, and I think you should be, too. Consider the implications. Even our most radical anti-meat-eaters, vegans, have to admit that ~~cloned~~^{cloning} meat this way raises no ethical dilemmas, unless they are both hyper-herbivores AND reactionary religionists who think any food technology beyond Mendelian cross-breeding is an abomination unto God. Speaking for myself, I'm a real conscientious ~~and~~^{and} conflicted carnivore. I love meat, but I hate that any

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animal has to die so that I can enjoy eating its body parts. That is a terrible kind of selfishness, and if I wasn't such a ridiculously picky eater (my only veggies are corn and potatoes, and many people disqualify both of those), I'd definitely choose a meat-free diet. I just can't condone cruelty to satisfy my taste buds, and no matter how "humanely" we cultivate and cage them, when we murder animals so we can eat them at will, that IS cruelty. I hate to participate in the slaughter, yet I do. How wonderful if I could eat all the beef, poultry, pork, and fish I wish and no ~~beast~~ ^{animals} suffer and die for my meals?

But forget the relatively minor moral concerns of the privileged. I think the more important consequence of cloning is making top-quality nutrition available to everyone, not just first-world gluttons. What happens to starvation on a planet where millions of calories in meat are produced hourly at a fraction of the cost of ~~beast~~ ^{slaughtered} flesh? Wouldn't this food source at full scale production be as cheap or cheaper than today's staple grains? From Mexico to Mozambique and Canada to Kyrgistan, people could fill themselves with protein-rich meat and sides of their usual staples, so that Indian exchange students no longer shock their American host families by being half the size of their classmates due to dietary deficiency. Think of the improvement for humanity... and the possibility is real. The techniques are maturing.

Of course, some will still oppose meat-eating because they think it's even more unhealthy than it is unethical. But our cloned meat surely can and will be optimized to provide maximum meaty goodness with a minimum of objectionable qualities, like fattiness. With so many benefits and so few moral qualms, all I can say is good luck to those scientists, and Bon Appetit!

* Today's quotation is a little lighter than usual, but no less insightful or illuminating:

"The kind of people who always go on about whether a thing is in good taste invariably have very bad taste." — Playwright Joe Orton

Ha ha, too true! And it reminds me of the lyric by Eminem, "You find me offensive? I find you offensive for finding me offensive...", and the teacher I had who was offended by my bad taste for including an Eminem lyric in a paper I once wrote. Also, of prosecutors. So it goes.