

## Texas A&M researchers explain ethics, future of human cloning

By **JILL REED**  
Science writer

Recent success in cloning animals has attracted scientific and public attention, and some faculty at Texas A&M University are looking at the new ethical and regulatory aspects of biotechnology.

Dr. Susanna Priest, the Interim Director of the Center for Science and Technology Policy and Ethics at Texas A&M University, said that scientists must make up their own minds about cloning at this stage because there has not been time to create federal or institutional policies.

However, some policies do already exist. "I think people have the impression that scientists can do whatever they want right now," Priest said, "and it is just not true."

There is an institutional review board at Texas A&M University, Priest said, for any research that uses animal or human subjects.

The research cannot be done if the board finds any ethical problems that cannot be resolved.

Priest said that cloning issues at Texas A&M University are handled using and modifying policies that are already in place.

"I'm not sure that we will ever reach the point where human cloning is considered ethical," Priest said. "I see some difficult problems that are going to be hard to solve."

Dr. Herman Saatkamp, head of the Department of Humanities in

Medicine at the Texas A&M University Health Science Center, said that cloning is valuable for medical and agricultural research, but it will not be considered ethical to clone humans until it is at least as safe as a normal, natural childbirth.

"People base their value judgments on what they understand about the technology in question," Saatkamp said, "and today there is very little known about the consequences of human cloning."

**"Most ethical disputes are based on factual disagreements."**

Dr. Herman Saatkamp  
Department of Humanities

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Dr. Mark Westhusin is a consultant to Ultimate Genetics, the company that helped clone the cows Charlie and George, and a researcher in the Reproductive Sciences Laboratory at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University.

"There are some things that we

don't understand," Westhusin said, "and we would absolutely not want to [clone] in humans until we were absolutely positive that it would be a safe procedure that would result in normal offspring."

Dr. Duane Kraemer, an Associate Dean for Research at the College of Veterinary Medicine, said that scientists are using animal models to make the results of cloning more predictable. As the technique becomes safer, early embryo mortality, late prenatal mortality and birth defects will be reduced.

Kraemer said that the new cloning technology could be valuable if scientists ever decide to use germ line gene transfer in humans.

It might be possible, Kraemer said, to either introduce a gene or to inactivate a defective gene in humans to prevent the transmission of a genetic condition.

The few embryos obtained that are free of a genetic disorder could be copied in large number to increase the odds that offspring retain the corrected gene.

Some have voiced concerns that the use of cloning could decrease genetic diversity in animal populations. Kraemer said "common sense should be used when applying the technology."

When it is managed properly, it does not necessarily reduce genetic diversity," Kraemer said, "and it can preserve endangered species that otherwise would not be preserved."

## Maroon carrots to be top seller

COLLEGE STATION (AP) — The Aggies have finally conquered the vegetable stand.

Maroon carrots developed by Texas A&M University will be commercially sold for the first time this week at select stores in Houston.

"The biggest problem will be having enough," said John Lackey, vice president of McManus Produce in Weslaco. "We have a lot of demand, but it's going to be in short supply for the first few weeks of harvest."

Lackey said his company, which grows the unique carrot, has begun harvest on a small acreage but will grow enough to be harvested throughout year.

The carrots, called BetaSweets are being harvested, sliced into coin shapes and packaged to Kroger's in Houston. Wal-Mart in Temple and H.E.B. grocery stores will receive shipments in late February, Lackey said.

"And then we'll build on it from there," he said. "I

know every one will want some."

The maroon carrot idea dates back to Leonard Pike, a horticulturist and director of Texas A&M University's Vegetable Improvement Program, who found some maroon-tinted carrots in his plots of regular orange carrots.

"The original goal was to breed a carrot that would be a novelty in the home garden," Pike said. Texas A&M's school colors are maroon and white. "But the goal changed as we began to learn that high beta carotene and anthocyanins are cancer preventive properties and are found in sweet carrots."

"It has gone beyond being a novelty, it may be some of that, too," he said. "The maroon carrot already just goes to show, health, nutrition and presentation are important to consumers in vegetables."

## New system for meat inspection takes heat

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government's new system for preventing contamination in processing plants is known by the acronym HACCP. Some meat and poultry inspectors sardonically say that means: "Have A Cup of Coffee and Pray."

Actually, it means "Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points," a system beginning Monday for the 312 largest meat and poultry processing plants that account for 75 percent of livestock slaughtered in the United States. It will be phased in over two years in the remaining 6,100 plants.

"We definitely have our work cut out for us, as there are many disturbing pitfalls and apparent weaknesses," Randy Wurtele, western president of the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals, said in a letter on the union council's Internet site.

Under the new regime, plants install their own facilities preventive measures to reduce *E. coli* and salmonella bacteria and improve sanitation. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the system is a "revolutionary improvement" over the old approach's reliance on sight, touch and smell.

Frontiers is a section that appears every Monday on page 2. Frontiers will cover research done at A&M as science finds its way around the world. These stories will be available on The Battalion Online.

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