Vision
Policy decisions and public debate informed by accurate, evidence-based scientific information in the news media.

Mission
To make it easier for journalists to access the best science when stories hit the headlines and to ensure that more scientists engage with the media when stories hit the headlines.

Values
Reliable, fast, accurate, authoritative, independent, media savvy.
SMC Philosophy

"We’ll get the media to ‘DO’ science better when scientists ‘DO’ media better "
Rapid Reactions
responding to breaking stories
January-February 2013

Horsemeat scandal

Rapid Reaction
Supermarket apologises after food watchdog’s findings

HORSE MEAT IN TESCO BURGERS
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Wednesday 16 January

Expert reaction to horse meat found in burgers

Dr Paul Wigley, Reader in Foodborne Zoonoses sat the University of Liverpool

“The consumption of horse meat is not common in the UK for cultural and aesthetic reasons. There is nothing inherently unhealthy about eating horse meat and it is commonly eaten in other parts of Europe and around the world.

“There are only a small number of abattoirs in the UK producing horse meat for human consumption but there are more in Europe. These abattoirs are subject to the same standards and legal requirements as abattoirs producing any other type of meat for human consumption. Horses need to be accompanied by a 'passport' that identifies the animal and confirms that it is intended for human consumption. The horses, as with other species, are inspected by the Official Veterinarian (OV) at the abattoir before they are killed. Each carcass is also inspected after slaughter to ensure that it is fit for human consumption.”

Catherine Collins, Principal Dietitian at St George's Hospital NHS Trust

“Few of us are directly involved in food production, so provenance is extremely important in being able to trust food producers who supply our foods. Horsemeat itself is as nutritious as other red meats, but the fact that it, and pork extracts, appeared in a beef product without notice is of concern - particularly for those following Kosher or Halal diets. Animal husbandry is another key issue for meat eaters, and of course there is no way to know the health or welfare of the animals included in these products.
More reaction from:

Dr Emma Roe, Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Southampton

Dr David Jukes, food law expert from the University of Reading

Michael Walker, Science and Food Law Consultant at LGC

Dr. Mark Tallon, Chair of the Food Law group at the Institute of Food Science & Technology (IFST)

Prof Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University London

Prof Chris Elliott, Director of the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen's University Belfast

Gaynor Bussell, Dietitian and member of the British Dietetic Association
Professor Chris Elliott, director of the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen’s University Belfast, said: “The current information suggests that this is an issue about food integrity and not safety, thankfully. The substitution of low-quality, low-value materials for the true foodstuff has plagued food production for centuries.”

Pork was also found in the burgers. Michael Walker, Science and Food Law Consultant at LGC, the laboratory services company, said this was “worrying in that cleaning and separation are basic to good hygiene and should have worked to prevent cross contamination.”

The Times
Michael Walker, a consultant at the international food analysts LGC, said human error could have been to blame for the adulteration. He said: "However, given the financial climate, it is also possible that fraud – including cheaper meats to 'bulk up' the main constituent meat product – is involved. If fraud was involved there is a risk that those checks were ignored, resulting in unknown possibilities of microbiological and chemical hazards such as food poisoning and veterinary drug residues."
Tim Lang, a professor of food policy at City University London, said the issue "does raise deep concerns."

"Firstly, is it fraud? No label declared the horsemeat or traces of pig DNA. Secondly, it appears to be adulteration, a cheaper meat being substituted for a more expensive one.

"Thirdly, and probably most importantly, this exposes failings in commercial food governance. Big retailers are supposedly in control of the food system, yet their management and contracts and specifications have been found wanting."

By James Davey
LONDON | Wed Jan 16, 2013 1:41pm GMT
(Reuters) - Horse meat found in beef burgers sold by Tesco was condemned by the Prime Minister on Wednesday and was likely to prove both embarrassing and costly for the firm.
Coverage continues with health scare claims...
DANGER DRUG IN UK HORSE MEAT

Tests reveal health hazard AFTER meat was exported to Europe

At least the PM’s still hungry...

‘Business as usual’ at plant watchdog said had been shut

One Shot Bod, a marksman for the Queen

‘Business is going great’
THE SUN
SAYS
Tale of whoa

THE horse meat scandal is galloping out of control. And no one in Government seems to have a clue how to reign it in.

Dad Robert Powell today tells how he got a horse-related liver infection after eating dodgy Findus lasagne.

And last night the contamination alert spread from frozen food as Asda bosses withdrew a hokkien sauce – the first fresh “beef” product to be affected.

Meanwhile Whitehall admits hundreds of British horse carcasses containing the potentially harmful painkiller bute may have got into our food chain.

Yet at an official briefing yesterday Chief Medical Officer Dame Sally Davies breezily dismissed the risk to humans as “very low”.

Is that supposed to comfort the millions of shoppers who will read Robert’s story with a shudder?

Or soothe the concerns of all the parents who have fed their children a burger in the past few years?

The Food Standards Agency’s handling of the crisis continues to be a shambles.

Its boss Catherine Brown yesterday tried to blame horse owners for not keeping up-to-date paperwork on medicines given to sick animals.

Never mind that her own agency has failed to ensure proper testing. Or that rogue elements in the industry appear to have been blatantly conniving consumers.

Public faith in our food has been shattered by the scale of the horse meat scandal.

To begin to restore it we need a full public inquiry that nails those responsible for what increasingly looks like a criminal conspiracy.

Then we can ensure they are punished as severely as the law allows.

We rate it

YESTERDAY The Sun told how David Cameron had hinted at the return of the 10p tax rate for low earners.

The ink was barely dry on our pages before Ed Miliband announced his big new idea. A 10p tax rate, funded by a mansion tax.

Miliband claims he wants to “put right the mistake” made by his former master Gordon Brown when he scrapped the 10p rate.

So why won’t he wholeheartedly commit his party to it – rather than

NAG-GATE: EXCLUSIVE
I got horse bug scoffing Findus pasta

ROB’S FEAR AFTER LASAGNE FEASTS

EXCLUSIVE byJames Seal

A DAD last night told how he was struck down by a crippling horse bug — after eating dodgy Findus beef lasagne.

Robert Powell, 40, feared he would die during his operating days in hospital after scoffing dozens of the meals — some of which were 100 per cent horse meat.

He was rushed when doctors found an infection in his liver and kidneys after he fell ill eating the Findus.

Last night doctors confirmed his fears when a Grave’s disease specialist found traces of horse meat in his blood.

Robert asked whether doctors asked whether he had ever eaten horse meat.

They told him the meat was horse “from a park in the country”.

Nagging worries Robert and wife, Belinda, fought a battle to get proper treatment.

Robert, a police detective, said: “I got a fever and my bowels stopped working.

“I had blood in my stool, which was part of the reason I was vomiting.

“I was kept in hospital for six weeks and I nearly died.”

The couple then went on the hunt for fresh food and fell ill again.

“Doctors kept telling me to keep off horse meat. The lasagne was horrible. The night before I was rushed to hospital by ambulance. I almost died.”

But it was too late. The couple took legal action against Findus and vowed never to eat horse meat again.

Nakita O’Reilly, 29, a mother of two from Hemel Hempstead, Herts, was just one of the 100,000 people tested for horse meat in the UK last year.

She tested positive for horse meat after eating the lasagne.

“Findus is a crock. It’s almost impossible to eat horse meat,” she said.

But parents across the country are still eating it as a result of the crisis.

“People are still eating horse meat. It’s not a problem for them,” said Robert.
Science Media Centre Rapid Reaction

IMMEDIATE RELEASE Thursday 24 January 2013

Expert reaction to MP’s claims about phenylbutazone and horse meat

Prof Sir Colin Berry, Emeritus Professor of Pathology at Queen Mary, University of London

Peter Jones, President of the British Veterinary Association

Prof Chris Elliott, Director of the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen's University Belfast

Prof Alastair Hay, Professor of Environmental Toxicology at the University of Leeds
Science Media Centre background briefing

What? Horsemeat – bute (phenylbutazone) and DNA testing

When? 10.00am, Tuesday 12 February 2013

Where? The Wellcome Trust, 215 Euston Road, NW1 2BE

The SMC has been dealing with many queries on the scientific aspects of the current horsemeat crisis and as per usual have asked a number of those experts to come to the SMC to answer your questions on continuing developments in this story.

Professor Tim Morris, Vice Chair of British Horse Industry Confederation

Michael Walker, Science and Food Law Consultant at LGC

Chris Smart, Corporate Business Development Manager at Leatherhead Food Research

Dr Mark Woolfe, Food Scientist/Technologist who has worked for 25 years as a Government Scientist (MAFF and the Food Standards Agency)
Phenylbutazone (bute) and horsemeat

Background

Phenylbutazone (bute) is a painkiller and anti-inflammatory drug used in horses and dogs.

Bute is one of the most widely used drugs in horses; it is an inexpensive, highly effective treatment that can be injected intravenously or given orally to horses as a powder or paste.

Findus have been ordered by the FSA to carry out tests for bute on their products which have been found to contain horsemeat.

Rules regarding use of bute in horses

- Since 2005, European law has required all horses to have a passport which declares whether it is for human consumption
  - Horses marked for human consumption have a limited number of medicines which can be administered
  - Use of any products that are not on a prescribed list of allowed substances automatically means a horse must be permanently excluded from the food chain.
    - This includes phenylbutazone
Print/online coverage

- BBC News
- Channel 4 News
- ITV News
- Sky News
- Times
- Guardian
- Guardian politics blog
- Independent
- Telegraph
- Daily Mail
- Express
- Mirror
- Sun
- Press Association
- Reuters
- Huffington Post
- Farmers Guardian
- Farmers Weekly

Broadcast coverage

- BBC Radio 4 Today Programme
- BBC Radio 4 News
- Newsnight
- BBC Radio 5 Live
- BBC Radio 4 Material World
Media Briefings

- scientists more in control of the way the story comes out

- a way for scientists and journalists to meet regularly and describe the process of science
15th April 2013

Food for the future: the potential of GM animals

Background Briefing
As the first GE animal is going through the regulatory process in the US (GM Salmon), there are other GE animals in an advanced research stage that have qualities not achievable by conventional breeding and there is a new technology (genome editing) that increases the opportunities for GE. On top of this we have a broader landscape of pressures of food security and a growing world population which mean that we need to consider all potentially useful technologies.

In the light of this the SMC has invited one of the UK’s leading experts, on GM animals Professor Helen Sang, to describe some of the ongoing applications of GM technologies in farm animals and the regulations governing them.

Journalists may remember Helen from her work on developing chickens that are resistant to bird flu.

**Professor Helen Sang, The Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh**

**Bruce Whitelaw, Professor of Animal Biotechnology, The Roslin Institute and Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies Division of Developmental Biology University of Edinburgh**

**Chris Warkup, President of the British Society of Animal Science and Director of the Biosciences Knowledge Transfer Network**
# Briefing attendees

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<td>Sean Poulter</td>
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Can this little piggy’s amazing life win over the enemies of GM?

Barbara Roslin said that the new technique protects GM animals with 30 percent efficiency compared to the gene-editing method. In contrast, “We do it without any marker system. Under no way this would you know how this mutation happened. It could have happened naturally, in a try-and-error kind of way,” she said.

Insisting, because the new gene-editing technique does not leave any mark in the animal’s genome, it is essential for animal welfare and the natural evolutionary process. For example, scientists can work with the rhesus monkey with efficiency of 90 percent.

“We as scientists are very excited about this because of very precise changes.”

In this case, the gene of GM can be found in about 5-7 percent of the overall genome. “We can avoid antibiotic resistance and other animal health issues we can get rid of cloning or nuclear-transfer technology as well. I think cloning does have some baggage attached to it. Whether we are very excited about this because of very precise changes and we can do it in every animal and not worry that it is not 100 percent another,” she added.

猪26 is a part of a research programme to create disease-resistant animals with African swine fever genes. Public opposition to GM food has halted the introduction of biotechnology in crops and farm animals.

However, if they could be protected, it would be fantastic, she added. Pig26 is a part of a research programme to create disease-resistant animals with African swine fever genes. Public opposition to GM food has halted the introduction of biotechnology in crops and farm animals.

However, if they could be protected, it would be fantastic, she added.
GM will help to feed the world

Scientists’ successful development of a novel and efficient method for creating genetically modified animals is unlikely to be welcomed by those who are unthinkingly opposed to what is often described as an unnatural interference with the human food chain.

For some, the term GM has come to symbolise all that is wrong with modern food production – intensive, commercial and, in the case of livestock, cruel. Before this latest technique is condemned out of hand, however, it is as well to consider some of the details, both as to what is involved and as to how it might be used.

So-called “genome editing” is not only far more efficient than existing GM technology, it is extremely precise in the genetic changes it brings about. There is also no need for the antibiotic resistance genes that have caused such controversy, raising fears that these “marker” genes might spread to animals and to people, rendering antibiotic drugs unworkable.

The most important aspect of the new development, though, is that it will make it easier for scientists to engineer improved domestic livestock. Given that some 17 per cent of farm animals in the developed world, and as many as 30 per cent in the developing world, are lost to animal diseases, any progress in that regard cannot easily be dismissed. And although conventional plant and animal breeding has improved both food crops and farm livestock immeasurably over the centuries, it will not continue to do so at the rate required to feed the ever-growing human population.

Cattle in particular could benefit from next-generation genetic engineering conferring resistance to animal diseases such as bird flu, say, or foot-and-mouth disease. These diseases, and the viruses that cause them, are, indeed, natural. But if we let nature take its course, we will starve. The alternative is simply to do what generations of farmers have done by breeding animals with genetic improvements – but this time with the help of DNA science.
Pig created in lab could bring home GM bacon

By Nick Collins
Science Correspondent

THE laboratory which created Dolly the sheep has produced a disease-resistant piglet using a new technique that is simpler than cloning and could bring genetically-modified meat a step closer.

The piglet, known only as “Pig 26”, was the first animal to be created via “gene-editing” when it was born four months ago at Edinburgh’s Roslin Institute. The new technique, which is faster and more efficient than cloning, avoids one of the major concerns of anti-GM campaigners because it does not involve the use of antibiotic-resistance genes.

Scientists hope it could make the genetic engineering of livestock more acceptable to the public and be key to the challenge of feeding the growing global population.

“Gene-editing” is a simple process whereby researchers snipped the animal’s DNA and inserted new genetic material, in effect changing a single one of the three billion “letters” that make up its genome.

Unlike previous GM technology, the method does not involve the use of antibiotic resistance genes, which the anti-GM lobby fears could lead to drugs becoming ineffective.

It has a success rate of 10 to 15 per cent, compared with less than one per cent for previous methods, and can be performed on a fertilised egg without the need for complicated cloning techniques.

Pig 26 was engineered to have a gene making it immune to African swine fever, which can kill European pigs in hours. The gene was taken from wild African pigs, which are naturally immune to the virus but cannot breed with European species.

Researchers said similar techniques could be used to make other livestock immune to diseases.

Daily Telegraph
Cleaner way of altering animal DNA to bring revolution in the farmyard

Hannah Devlin Science Editor

Scientists have developed a way to modify animals genetically so that the changes to their DNA are indistinguishable from naturally occurring mutations. This “clean” GM technique could overcome objections to the technology being used in Britain, and lead to GM cows, pigs and chickens that grow larger more quickly, produce more eggs and milk and have enhanced resistance to disease.

Presenting the work yesterday in London, scientists from the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, the birthplace of Dolly the sheep, predicted that the advance would revolutionise the field.

Bruce Whitelaw, who led the work, said: “If you didn’t know how the animal had been produced, you’d have no way of knowing how the mutation happened. It could have happened naturally.” The method allows genetic changes to be introduced into livestock, to protect them against disease or make them grow faster for instance, without the need for cloning.

It also eliminates the need to introduce antibiotic-resistant genetic tags as part of the modification process, often cited as an environmental concern.

However, the scientists conceded that despite removing two central concerns, the lack of appetite for GM products in Europe meant that the techniques were likely to be first commercialised in the United States and China.

In one experiment, Professor Whitelaw successfully replaced a gene in the Eurasian pig with the version carried by African bush pigs, which confers immunity to African swine fever. He is also planning an experiment with cows, which would be modified with a baboon gene that protects against sleeping sickness.

The gene-editing technique works by taking the zygote, the earliest developmental phase of the embryo, and using molecular techniques to snip out the normal version of a gene and replace it with a version taken from another species.

By contrast, conventional GM techniques start by taking skin cells from an animal. These are then modified, but because the modifications are successful in only a small fraction of cells, scientists include an antibiotic resistant gene as a tag. This lets them kill off unsuccessful cells.

The nucleus of the modified skin cell is then inserted into an egg, which is grown in culture and transplanted into a “foster” animal to produce a modified clone, but many cloning pregnancies fail.
Scientists who created Dolly the sheep clone bring GM food a step closer by producing a pig that is immune to disease

- 'Pig 26' was created through a process called 'gene editing'
- Technique faster and more efficient than existing methods
- It is immune to African swine fever which can kill within 24 hours
- Believed the development could bring GM meat a step closer

By AMANDA WILLIAMS
PUBLISHED: 12:36, 16 April 2013 | UPDATED: 14:35, 16 April 2013

The laboratory which created Dolly the sheep has produced a disease-resistant piglet using a new technique which is simpler than cloning.

It is believed the development could bring GM meat a step closer.

The piglet, known as 'Pig 26', was created through a process called 'gene editing' at Edinburgh's Roslin Institute four months ago.

It was engineered to have a gene making it immune to African swine fever which can kill European pigs within 24 hours of infection.

The technique is faster and more efficient than existing methods, and also does not involve the use of antibiotic-resistance genes.

Prof Whitelaw said the technique was garnering interest from commercial companies and international regulators are now considering how to classify it.

The first genetically modified meat and fish could be approved this summer.

Authorities in the US are expected to grant approval to Aquabounty salmon, which has been modified to grow twice as fast as normal salmon.

And experts trying to combat world hunger are calling on the British Government to back the use of GM farm animals on the dinner table here.

The push into GM meat could see the production of giant pigs, hens that have only female chicks and cattle made disease resistant using genes from baboons.

But the move will alarm critics of the use of GM technology who are still battling to block the expansion of genetically modified crops.

Professor Helen Sang, GM animal expert at the Roslin Institute – where Dolly the sheep was cloned – insisted fears surrounding 'Frankenstein foods' can be overcome.

Roslin scientists yesterday called on the Government to support the spread of GM into farm animals but admit there will need to be a change in attitude among British families and retailers.
Genetically modified animals could boost UK food security

15 April 2013 | By Olivia Midgley

UK SCIENTISTS working to genetically engineer (GE) animals say there could be an appetite for them in the future.

Professor Helen Sang and Prof Bruce Whitelaw from the University of Edinburgh’s Roslin Institute, who have been studying genetically modified (GM) chickens and pigs, said there were ‘huge benefits’ to the technology.

Speaking to journalists in London this morning (Monday), Prof Sang said there was a ‘real technical push’ to develop animals ‘which cannot be achieved by conventional breeding’.

She added the ‘societal push’ of food security meant producing animals which could be more disease resistant and grow bigger and stronger, faster, was more important than ever.

It comes as the first GE salmon goes through the regulatory process in the US.

The salmon, which has been developed by Aquabounty includes a gene from the Chinook salmon which provides the fish with the potential to grow to market size in half the time of conventional salmon.
12\textsuperscript{th} November 2013

Is Big Bad?

News Briefing
Former CSA John Beddington famously described the future as a perfect storm of climate change, population growth and food shortages and called on scientists to use all the tools in the box to tackle the great challenges. But is larger more intensive farming part of the problem or the solution? From the Archers to the popular media intensive farming has a bad name with plenty of assumptions about poor animal welfare and putting commercial gain above environmental damage. Inspired by a meeting called Is Big Bad at the Roslin Institute earlier this year, the SMC has invited leading experts to brief journalists on the views of agricultural scientists and vets on this controversial area, answering questions such as:

Are big farms necessarily intensive?
Can big farms address the Five Freedoms for Animal Welfare?
Is "a life worth living" an attempt to move the animal welfare debate away from the scientifically validated Five Freedoms approach?
Do small traditional farms meet modern standards of animal welfare, pollution control and sustainability?
What is big in dairying? 50 cows, 500 ? 5000 ?
What is the wider context of the debate?

Speakers include

Prof Christine Nicol, Professor of Animal Welfare, University of Bristol
Annie Davis, veterinary practitioner to the pig industry and Chair, Pig Veterinary Society
Tim Brigstocke, Policy Director, The Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF)
Professor Toby Mottram, Royal Agricultural College
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How can you tell if a chicken is happy?

A scientist claims caged hens enjoy a better quality of life than free-range birds. Has sanity flown the coop, asks Harry Wallop

At first, the above scale is hard to follow. I can see your eye roll up after a few of the words. But the article is interesting and may cause you to reflect on your own views about chicken welfare. The article is written by Harry Wallop, a journalist at The Daily Telegraph.

The Daily Telegraph
Caged hens are 'happier than free-range'

Research from the University of Bristol suggests birds kept in 'enriched cages' have higher welfare standards.

Free-range eggs might be the product of choice for the animal welfare-conscious shopper, but new research suggests hens kept in indoor cages are happier.

Birds raised in “enriched cages” had fewer fractures, lower mortality, lower stress levels and did less damage in pecking each other than free-range birds, a study found.

The difference could be explained by the fact that “a lot can go wrong” on free-range farms, according to Professor Christine Nicol, who led the research at the University of Bristol.

Free-range hens are often distressed by unpleasant weather or predators such as foxes, she said, adding that it could take up to five years before the welfare of free-range hens was better than that of caged ones.

“Enriched cages” accommodate flocks of 70 or 80 birds living in stacked enclosures with access to food, water perches and scratching posts.
UK needs 'mega farms' to keep food prices down, say experts

Mega farms are controversial because the animals can be kept without daylight indoors for most of the time

Fiona Harvey, environment correspondent
The Guardian, Tuesday 12 November 2013 18.13 GMT
Jump to comments (168)

What do chickens want? A veranda

Given the choice, hens would choose a veranda as part of their environment, say experts - but then, hens aren't given a choice

Verandas – where there is overhead roofing but also open access to outside space – are a handy way of giving hens shelter when they need it. Photograph: Gillian Wong/AP

Mega farms where hundreds or thousands of large animals, such as cows and pigs, are housed together in enormous sheds are controversial. Photograph: Christian Charisius/REUTERS
Welfare standards are on average higher in laying hens kept in cages than in free range flocks, according to a leading veterinary expert.

Enriched cages, which have replaced battery cages, are not ideal but produce better conditions than some free-range farms, said Prof Christine Nicol of Bristol University.

Hens need space for perching, nesting and scratching.
Friday 16th May 2014

Is the use of antibiotics in farming to blame for antibiotic resistance in humans?

Background Briefing
26th October 2015

IARC classification of processed meat as “carcinogenic to humans” and red meat as “probably carcinogenic to humans”, published in The Lancet Oncology

Rapid Reaction
Renewables
Biomarkers for depression
Global temperature slowdown
Sugar and health
Mobile phones and brain tumours
Flooding
Air pollution
E-cigarettes
GM potatoes
Schizophrenia
Vaccines
Nuclear power stations
Statins
Proton beam therapy
Animal research
Farming and animal welfare
Organic food
Bees and pesticides
Farming and animal welfare
Statins
E-cigarettes
GM potatoes