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## Scientists Clone Pigs to Make Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Written by Mario Ritter 03 April 2006

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I'm Faith Lapidus with the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

Scientists say they have developed pigs that produce omega-three fatty acids. These fatty acids are believed to help fight heart disease. But it could be some time before these experimental pigs go to market.

The animals are clones, genetic copies of each other. The Food and Drug Administration has never approved a cloned animal for use as food. Still, some people believe Americans might someday buy the new pork if they see it as heart-healthy.

Professor Jing Kang at Harvard Medical School took the first step in the work that led to the cloned pigs. His research suggests that no mammal naturally produces omega-three fatty acids. So Doctor Kang genetically engineered mice with a gene that can create them from another fatty acid.

He took the gene from a kind of small worm that scientists have studied for years. Doctor Kang published his findings with two other researchers in two thousand four.

This research led the way for Randall Prather at the University of Missouri to clone pigs that can do the same thing. Pigs have been cloned before, but not for a purpose like this. Last month, Nature Biotechnology published a report describing how the experiment was done. Seventeen scientists took part in the study.

Fatty acids are the building materials of fat. Omega-three fatty acids are believed to reduce the risk of heart disease. They are also thought to reduce levels of harmful cholesterol in the blood.

The human body can make most kinds of fat by itself out of sugars. But it cannot make omega-three or omega-six fatty acids. These must come from foods or dietary supplements.

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But it is still not clear how soon genetically engineered animals might be approved for Americans to eat. Some people would have no concerns about eating meat produced through biotechnology. Others, though, say they see the idea as a step too far removed from nature.

This new research is aimed at producing pigs with a healthier form of fat.

Fat gives flavor. But in the United States, pork producers have cut the fat, hoping to appeal to people worried about heart disease. Twenty years ago the industry launched a marketing campaign comparing pork to chicken. It called pork "the other white meat."

Now the National Pork Board has a new marketing campaign. The aim is to get Americans to think of pork as a way to add a little excitement to dinner. The message: "Don't be blah."

This VOA Special English Agriculture Report was written by Mario Ritter. I'm Faith Lapidus.

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