

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“GE Animals in New Zealand: the first fifteen years” documents the world's first field trials of transgenic cows. These cows have been bred to express one of six transgenic protein traits in their milks for use as bio-pharmaceutical products (biologics). AgResearch has carried out these trials for the last fifteen years, 2000 - 2015, at their Ruakura facility in Hamilton, New Zealand.

The information is obtained from Official Information Act (OIA) requests and the comprehensive health details in the AgResearch reports that were submitted annually to the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA), now the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA).

These annual reports catalogue a sad and profoundly disturbing story of illness, reproductive failure and birth deformities that have consistently afflicted the genetic engineering (GE) trials.

Both the surrogate and transgenic cows suffer from chronic illness, reproductive losses, sudden unexplained deaths and severe deformities, relating to the foreign DNA inserted in the embryos used in the artificial insemination programme. Most of the transgenic cows are not able to reproduce past the first generation. The transgenic cows that have produced a second generation have borne sterile offspring.

After fifteen years of experimentation, from the many thousands of transgenic embryos the cows have carried, the average live birth rate has ranged from 0 - 7%. These embryos have been predominately developed offshore in the private partnership laboratories. In December 2014, there were a total of 19 transgenic cows survive at the Ruakura facility.

Clinical trials on transgenic proteins have resulted in allergic reactions in subjects causing the trials to be terminated early. It is noteworthy that, the proteins that these animals have been modified to express are available on the market today, made from simpler non-transgenic processes or produced in genetically engineered bacteria in laboratory containment.

Omission or carefully selected reporting of important experimental data to the media has enabled AgResearch to avoid scrutiny into the tragic results of using animals as bioreactors. Questions need to be asked as to how the Ruakura Animal Ethics Committee, of which the SPCA is a member, reviews and approves GE animal research activities, with particular reference to animal welfare concerns. There are serious gaps in the management of the experiments and a collective silence on the treatment of animals.

The animals' suffering has been going on for many years, hidden from public view. Research must not be able to continue to over ride the moral or ethical responsibilities that arise from scientific endeavors.

Recently, AgResearch has announced that they have significant and ongoing funding challenges. This report questions whether the GE animals trials has led to some of the problems they are facing. Regardless, these costly GE trials are a failure and should be closed down immediately to stop further animals' suffering.

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