

Consumer perceptions of food products from cloned
animals: implications for risk communication

George Gaskell
London School of Economics
EFSA's Advisory Group on Risk
Communications

Personal background

- An undisciplined social scientist
- A decade of studying the social implications and public perceptions of the life sciences
- No 'axe to grind' on cloned animals for food production
- An interest in mapping scenarios of possible public receptions of innovations in the life sciences – the science of life

Risk communication

- Communication: requires taking the role of the other – understanding their perspective(s) and framing appropriate messages
- Risk: the scientific and the intuitive approaches
 - These may correspond but can be discrepant when social values enter the picture.
- A prerequisite for effective risk communication is understanding both the science and the contours of public perceptions

The Scientific Opinion

- Based on current knowledge there is no expectation that clones or their progeny would introduce any new food risks compared to conventionally bred animals
- In relation to food safety it is recommended to
- Collect data on the health of clones as well as data on the characteristics of meat and milk
- Routinely monitor levels of chemical contaminants in meat and milk
- EFSA Draft Opinion

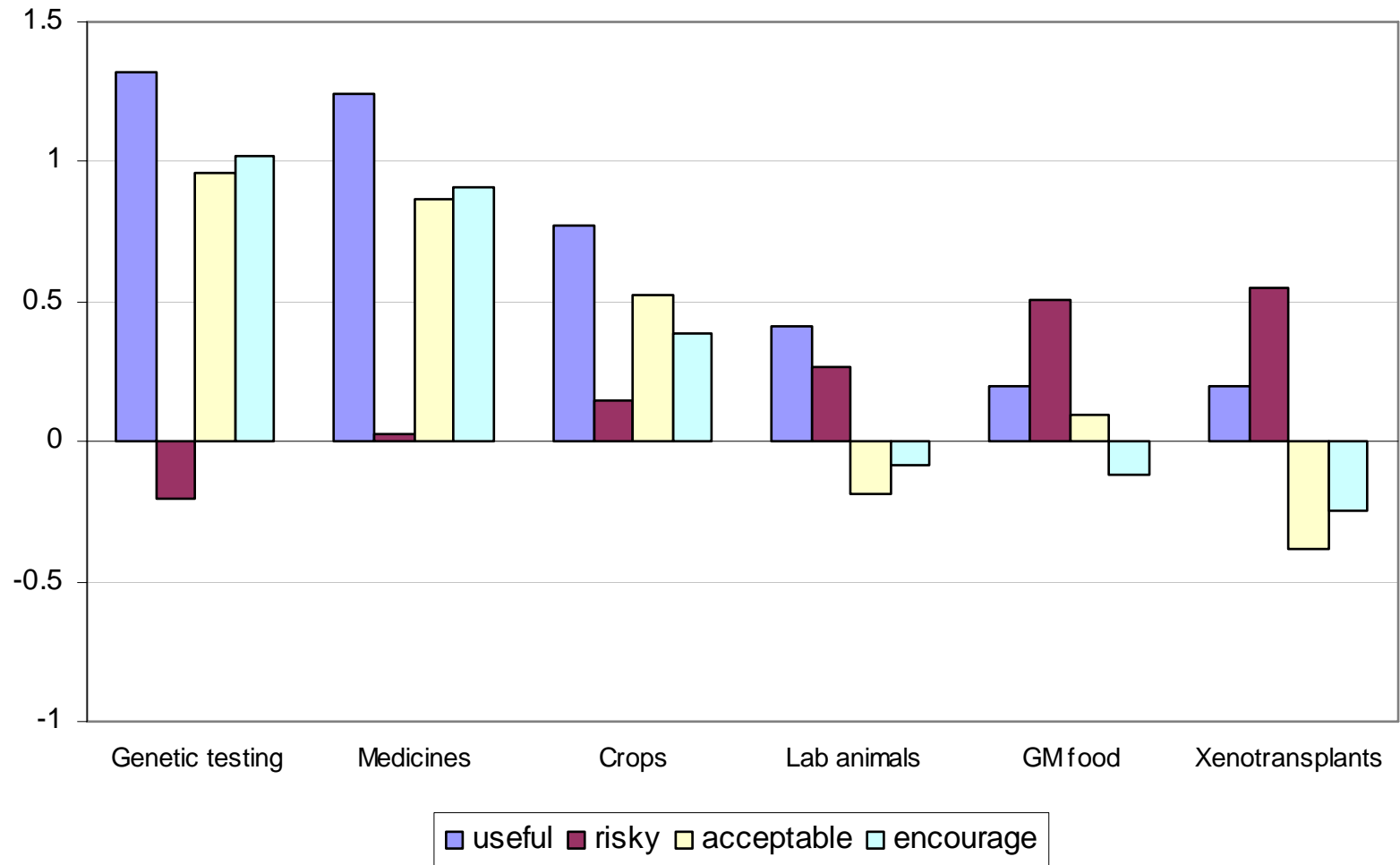
The Ethical Opinion

- On the grounds of animal welfare “doubts as to whether cloning animals for food supply is ethically justified. Whether this applies to progeny is open to further scientific research”
- If introduced, only under a number of specific conditions
- European Group on Ethics

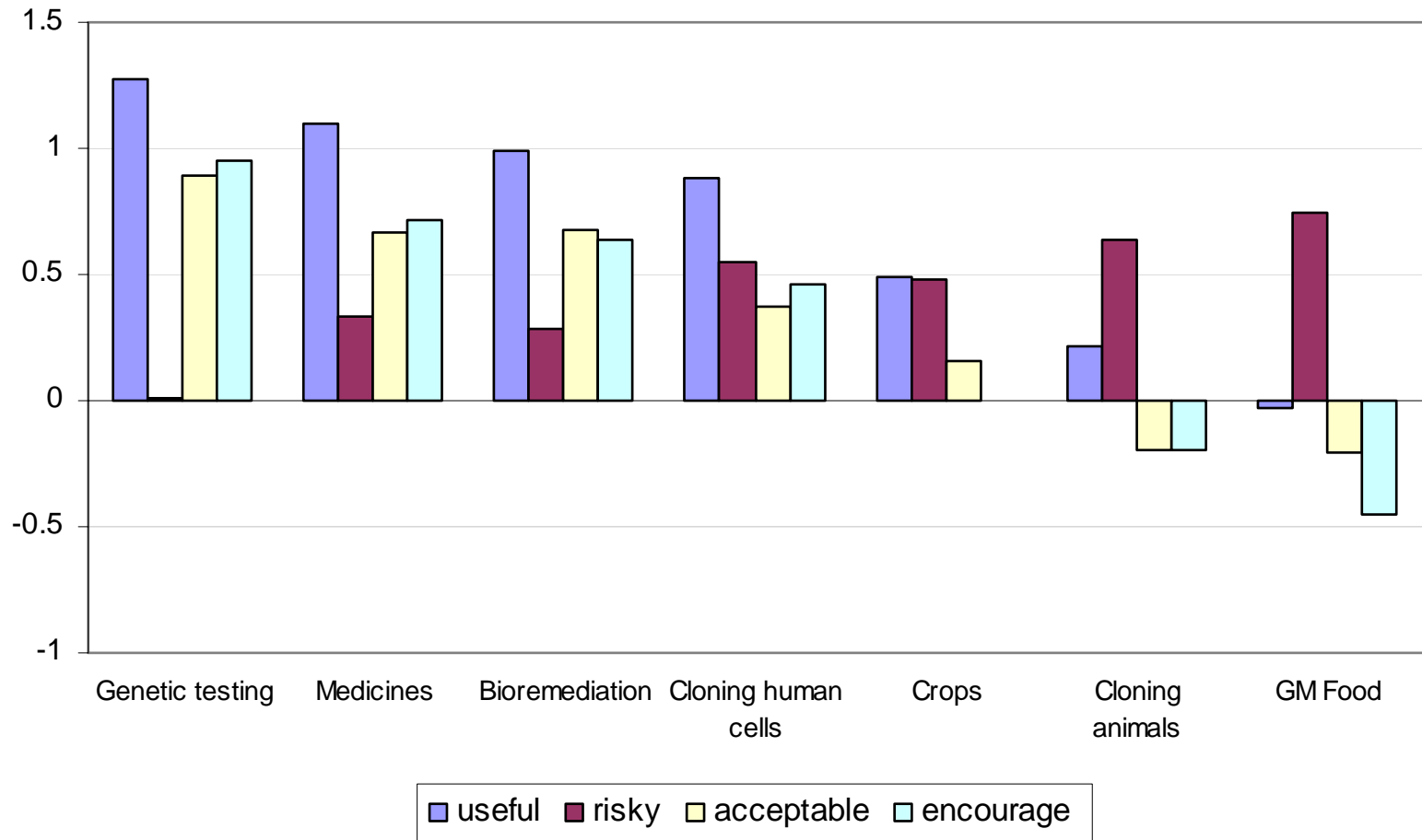
Consumer/public perceptions

- Literature review and commentary by Gaskell (UK), Kronberger (A), Fischler (Fr), Hampel (D) and Lassen (Dk)
- In Europe little research on the specific issue of cloned animals for food products
- Our objective is to use current knowledge to map possible public responses
- Eurobarometer surveys in 1996 and 1999 show the public to see various cloning applications as 'risky', 'morally unacceptable' and thus 'not supported'

1996 – European perceptions of six biotechnologies



1999: European perceptions



Genetic modification: what is more or less acceptable to the public

- **Organism**

- Humans

- Animals

- Plants

- Micro-organisms

Less acceptable



More acceptable

- **Application**

- Food

- Agriculture

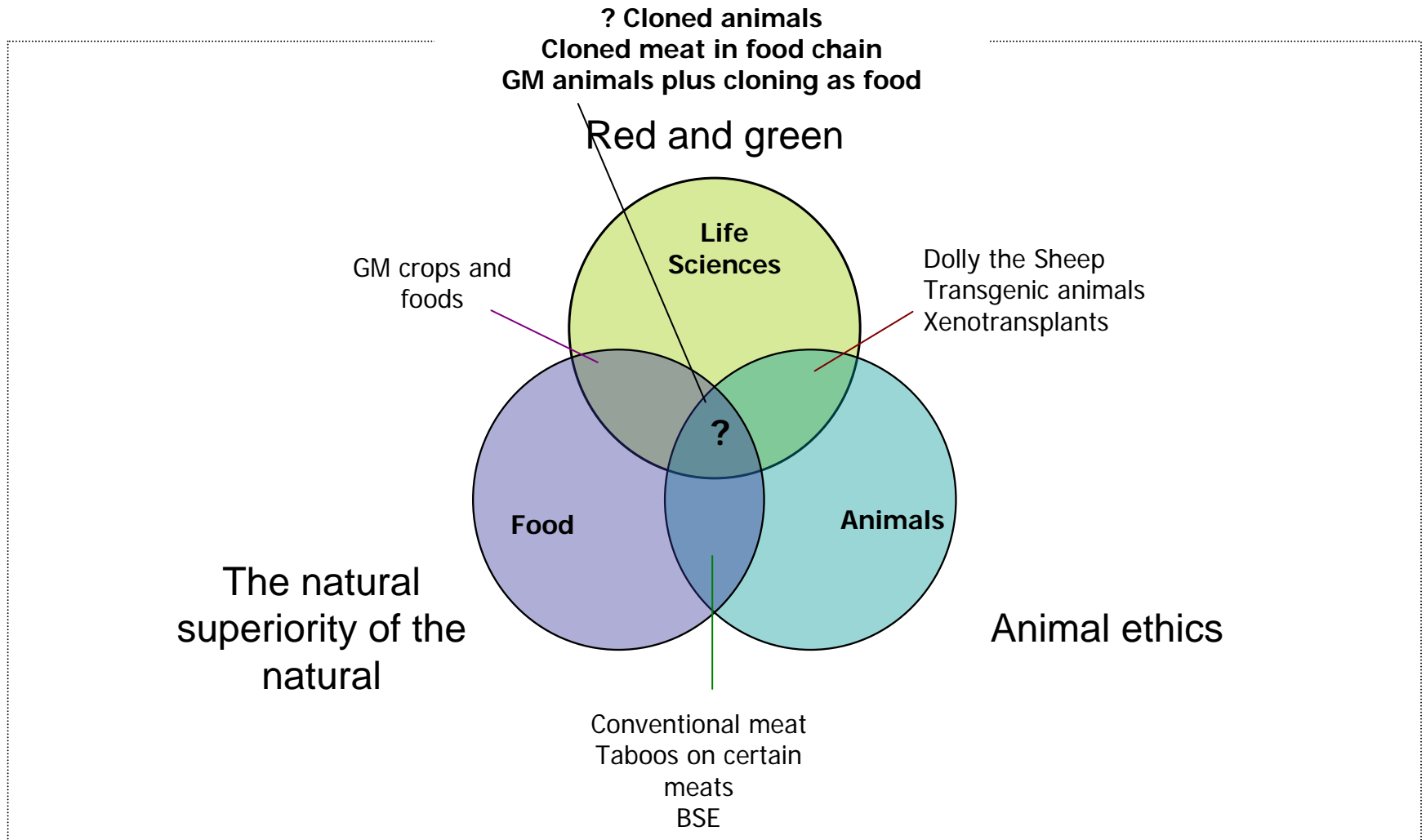
- Health/environment

- Medical

Two cultures of risk

- Scientific – taking account of empirical findings on toxicological, genotoxic and allergenic hazards
- Public – a more inclusive definition of risk
 - Intuitive scientists/economists – risks and benefits
 - Intuitive politicians – equity, consumer rights, is this in safe hands?
 - Intuitive ethicists – some beliefs and values are non-contingent – it may be safe but is this a world in which we want to live

Food, animals and biotechnology: an explosive combination



Potential vetos

- Risks, benefits and need
- Choice and labelling
- Fairness and distributional issues
- Responsibility in dealing with uncertainty and morally sensitive issues
- Values – beliefs about nature, life and animals

Issues for risk communication

- Whatever science defines, re-presentations drive public perceptions
 - Will clones be anchored in the GM debate?
 - what will be included in the category of cloned?
 - will cloned parentage make the F1s unnatural?
- The role of benefits – do we need this?
- Labelling – will consumer choice be guaranteed?
- Judging by EFSA's opinion and that of the EGE animal cloning for food products is likely to be a socially sensitive technology thus:
- Public consultation is needed
- A 'sunshine' approach to risk communications – EFSA and DG SANCO should adopt a proactive and transparent strategy
- Judging from the UK press the process – scientific and ethical opinions – has not been understood.