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## A Looking Glass Steer

Being a farm kid used to be simpler. That was our thought upon learning that this year's grand champion steer at the Iowa State Fair's 4-H Market Beef competition is a clone of the 2008 grand champion steer. This year's winner — who weighs 1,320 pounds and is named Doc — was "conceived" from an ear punch taken from his esteemed predecessor. The result was a cloned bull that was then neutered to produce Doc the steer.

Both winning animals were owned by the Haber family, from Sioux Center, Iowa, which runs a livestock reproduction company and is partners with an agriculture cloning firm. So far, there is no rule against showing cloned animals in 4-H competitions.

Just to complete the strange circuitousness in this story, Doc was purchased back at auction by his breeders in order to keep him from merging with the general beef supply after slaughter. That is in accordance with a voluntary moratorium on cloned meat requested by the Department of Agriculture.

Because Doc's cloning wasn't revealed until a couple of days later, fairgoers who attended the judging were deprived of the full "Groundhog Day" moment. The ethics of cloning animals is complicated enough. But we think it's safe to say that the showing of cloned animals seems unfair, if only because the technology is well out of the reach of most farm families, who have to make do the old-fashioned way with cows and bulls.

And yet Doc has been useful. A cloned steer highlights the peculiar limitation of cloning, as opposed to ordinary reproduction. Cloning can only ever replicate what is, while biological breeding — even with artificial insemination and embryo transplants common in the cattle industry — continues to offer what hasn't yet been.

