



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on September 16, 2010

Genetic Engineering Goes Upstream

Dubbed "Frankenfish" by Alaska Senator Mark Begich, AquaBounty Technologies' salmon are poised to become the first genetically-engineered (GE) animals to enter the U.S. food supply. Though the FDA has declared these fish, marketed under the name AquaAdvantage, to be safe, Consumers Union senior scientist Michael Hansen has called the science used to justify the FDA's decision "sloppy," "misleading," and "woefully inadequate."



Food and Water Watch, a non-profit organization advocating for safe and healthy [food and water](#), has sponsored a letter to President Obama, Kathleen Sebelius, and FDA officials urging rejection of the GE salmon.

AquaBounty Technologies claims their fish reach market weight in nearly half the time required for farmed salmon. Since the fish will all be females, and sterile, they will be unable to breed, thereby protecting AquaBounty's intellectual property.

Jill Richardson, [writing](#) for Alternet September 13, described the process for creating and raising the fish entirely in freshwater, adding that "The science AquaBounty provided the FDA was sloppy ... yet the FDA accepted it and declared the fish safe. Because the approval of [the] salmon will set a precedent, it is important that the FDA set its bar for solid science high." Michael Hansen claims the agency has failed to do that.

The samples used for testing, according to Richardson, were smaller than the minimum needed to have statistical significance, and AquaBounty has admitted to culling deformed fish prior to selecting ones for study. The study also examined only adult fish, not those in every life stage. The AquaBounty study included hormone levels in the fish, every single one showing growth hormone levels that fell below a detection limit. Because fish allergies are among the eight most common in the U.S., the GE salmon were also tested for allergenicity. Michael Hansen complained that the sample size was too small, and that all but two of the GE fish had a higher value of allergic potency than non-GE salmon.

Hansen also took issue with AquaBounty's alarming practice of ignoring unfavorable data and relying on favorable data. In 2007, the data was the best for GE fish, and the worst for non-GE fish. AquaBounty used this data for many of its studies. In addition, Hansen noted that reports of increased inflammation in the tissues of GE salmon may result in increased antibiotic use, and that consumers caring about animal welfare may wish to avoid the fish because GE salmon exhibited higher rates of deformities than non-GE salmon.

Consumers Union — citing serious food-safety issues — has written FDA officials requesting that the 14-day review period allotted for approval (which it said is far too short) be extended to the standard 60 days.



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Jill Richardson also noted, "Under current law, genetically engineered foods are not required to be labeled as such. The only labeling one can expect on a genetically engineered salmon fillet is country-of-origin labeling." Her article focused on the "sloppy science" used to pass this product through the regulatory system, but savvy consumers will also be concerned with other issues of intellectual property, non-labeling, and a government-controlled food supply.

AquaBounty is also developing advanced-hybrid trout and tilapia.

On September 19-21, a series of public meetings will be held as the next step in the approval process for the genetically-engineered salmon.



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