



FDA Approves GMO Salmon, Rules Against Labeling for GMO Plants

The Food and Drug Administration continues to collude with bioengineering companies, despite growing evidence that genetically modified products are potentially [harmful](#) to human health and the environment. On November 19, it approved genetically modified salmon, dubbed “Frankenfish” by many health-conscious Americans, as safe for human consumption, marking the first time that a genetically altered animal has been approved. At the same time, the FDA administered new rules that state genetically modified plant foods do not need to be labeled as such.



According to the *New York Times*, the FDA’s approval of the AquaAdvantage genetically modified salmon “caps a long struggle for AquaBounty Technologies, a small company that first approached the FDA about approval in the 1990s.”

The decision was reportedly a surprise even to AquaBounty, states Ronald Stotish, chief executive of AquaBounty. “We had no indication that approval was imminent,” he claimed.

The *New York Times* reports that the approved salmon “contains a growth hormone gene from the Chinook salmon and a genetic switch from the ocean pout, an eel-like creature, that keeps the transplanted gene continuously active, whereas the salmon’s own growth hormone gene is active only parts of the year.”

The FDA determined it could regulate the genetically engineered salmon under the new “animal drug” provisions of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act because the recombinant DNA (rDNA) construct introduced into the animal meets the definition of a “drug.”

The approval came even as two million people filed public comments with the FDA in opposition, the largest number of comments the agency ever received on an action, [according](#) to the Center for Food Safety.

The Food and Drug Administration defended its decision, stating that the fish is safe to eat and that the inserted elements will not harm the fish. Likewise, AquaBounty provided enough proof that the salmon grew at a faster rate, allowing them to reach market weight in 18 to 20 months as opposed to 28 to 36 months.

The FDA also determined that the fish does not need to be labeled as genetically engineered.

Reaction to the FDA’s approval of genetically modified salmon was immediate. Environmental groups opposed the salmon, arguing that safety studies were inadequate and that the wild salmon populations could be negatively impacted if the fish were to escape into oceans and rivers.

“This unfortunate, historic decision disregards the vast majority of consumers, many independent



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scientists, numerous members of Congress and salmon growers around the world, who have voiced strong opposition,” Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch, said in a statement.

The Center for Food Safety has announced plans to sue the FDA in coordination with other plaintiffs to block the agency’s approval for the sale and consumption of the salmon.

Andrew Kimbrell, executive director of Center for Food Safety, accused the FDA of betraying its responsibility to the public.

“In approving the AquaBounty transgenic salmon, the FDA ignored millions of Americans and more than 40 members of Congress who have expressed vocal opposition. FDA also neglected the concerns of more than 300 environmental, consumer, health and animal welfare organizations, salmon and fishing groups and associations, food companies, chefs and restaurants,” he opined.

The Center for Food Safety contends that the concerns raised by environmental and consumer groups are legitimate, citing a study by Canadian researchers that found GE salmon can cross-breed with brown trout, which could pose risks to wild populations of salmon that are already threatened.

AquaBounty, on the other hand, claims that nearly 99 percent of its AquaAdvantage salmon are sterile females that could not breed with wild fish. However, the rapid growth rate of the GM salmon raises the possibility of the fish outcompeting wild salmon for food, whether or not any interbreeding could occur. To help alleviate this concern, AquaBounty says it is marketing its fish to be raised in land-based aquaculture farms to limit the chance fish of escaping into the wild.

Alongside the approval of the genetically modified salmon, the FDA ruled that GM plant foods do not require labeling. The agency defended that decision by insisting that the plant foods are safe:

The agency is not aware of any valid scientific information showing that foods derived from genetically engineering plants, as a class of food, differ from other foods in any meaningful way. GE foods don’t present greater safety concerns than foods developed by traditional plant breeding.

The FDA made certain exceptions to these rules. For example, anytime a food derived from a genetically engineered plant is “materially different from its traditional counterpart,” the food’s label must reflect that difference, but the requirement permits companies to be vague in this disclosure, rather than simply label the product as genetically modified. For example, soybean oil that has been genetically engineered to contain higher levels of oleic acid must now be labeled “high oleic soybean oil.”

Many consumers are concerned about the consumption of genetically modified organisms and rely on the accuracy of labels to help avoid those foods. But despite demands from consumer and environmental groups, the FDA has insisted that there is no need for labels on GM foods.

“Food manufacturers may voluntarily label their foods with information about whether the foods were not produced using bioengineering, as long as such information is truthful and not misleading,” the FDA said.

NBC News observes that by allowing the labeling of genetically engineered products to be voluntary, the United States sets itself apart from many other countries, including the European Union, Australia, and China, all of which require labels on such products.

Critics contend that the FDA has been bought by the same corporate interests that it’s supposed to be regulating. The agency’s “revolving door” hiring practices, which allow employees from private corporations with financial interests in FDA policies to join the FDA and then return to their private sector positions after they leave their government jobs, are a prime example of that.



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East Bay Express observes, for example, that “Michael Taylor, the FDA’s deputy commissioner for Foods and Veterinary Medicine, [is a former Monsanto lobbyist](#) who served as the vice president for Public Policy at the Monsanto Corporation from 1998 until 2001.” Monsanto is the largest producer of genetically modified seeds in the world and the leading producer of the herbicide glyphosate, a “probable human carcinogen,” according to the World Health Organization.

The biotech industry has been very influential with the FDA, leading to genetically engineered versions of certain food crops being almost ubiquitous. For instance, in 2013, 93 percent of soybeans, 90 percent of corn, 90 percent of cotton, and 95 percent of sugar beets were genetically engineered.

But the battle is not over yet, as major retailers are rejecting the bioengineered “food.”

Red Lobster announced in the *Dallas Morning News* last week that it will not be selling the GMO salmon. And Costco Wholesale, the third largest retailer in the United States, has committed to not selling the genetically modified salmon. Costco is joined by more than 60 supermarket chains, including Kroger, Trader Joe’s, and Whole Foods. Walmart, the world’s largest retailer, and Publix have not yet rejected the salmon.

“The market is rejecting GMO salmon. Stores won’t sell it and people don’t want to eat it,” said Dana Perls, food and technology policy campaigner with environmental activist group Friends of the Earth. “Now other retailers like Walmart and restaurants need to follow suit, and we need mandatory GMO labeling so that consumers know how to avoid GMO salmon.”

“People have a right to know if the fish they are eating and feeding their children is genetically engineered with the DNA of an eel-like ocean pout to continuously pump out growth hormones,” continued Perls. “Friends of the Earth will be closely monitoring the market. In the absence of labeling, we will continue to push retailers to not sell this risky fish and plan to test salmon and notify consumers directly if stores attempt to hide GMO salmon under false marketing.”

And while consumer groups are doing their part to fight the FDA’s decision, concerned individuals are encouraged to sign this [petition](#) and ask the president and Congress to revoke the FDA’s approval.



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