



**By Food and Water Watch**

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By now, you've probably heard Obama's salmon joke. The one that induced laughter in an otherwise largely divided Congress during his State of the Union last night. Calling out the often complicated, bureaucratic nature of government regulation, Obama said: "The Interior Department is in charge of salmon while they're in fresh water, but the Commerce Department handles them when they're in saltwater. And I hear it gets even more complicated once they're smoked."

If it gets that complicated when they're smoked, how complicated is it when they're genetically engineered? As it turns out, it's pretty complicated and risky.

The FDA might approve genetically engineered (GE) salmon as the first GE animal for human consumption any day now. But what has this largely secretive approval process entailed? And why are over 90 percent of consumers saying they wouldn't eat GE meat, while government officials at agencies like the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services warn of environmental disaster, stating "Maybe they [the FDA] should watch Jurassic Park"?

The FDA lacks an up-to-date method for assessing GE salmon's impact on consumer health. They've analyzed the fish as a "veterinary drug", not a food product. Three of the four studies the agency based its review on were non-peer-reviewed and conducted by AquaBounty, the very company that would benefit from producing the fish.

Furthermore, The FDA has failed to address critical issues surrounding the potential for escaped, genetically engineered salmon to impact wild salmon populations. The agency should conduct an environmental impact statement, required by law under the National Environmental Policy Act, for any regulatory action that could negatively affect the human environment. To make matters worse, the FDA, which has completed its faulty approval process, could decide tomorrow to put GE salmon on the market without even requiring labeling.

Over the last decade, the biotechnology industry has spent over half a billion pushing controversial products like GE food. Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions and lobbying expenditures by biotechnology interests more than doubled during this time. So President Obama, while your joke was admittedly funny, it's also all too true. Instead of making jokes, your administration needs to intervene before yet another convoluted "regulatory structure" is added to our already overburdened food system and these largely untested GE fish are unleashed on an unsuspecting public, paving the way for other poorly regulated GE animals (pigs and cows are already in the works).

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