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Petition: Classify GE salmon as 'food additive'

Three consumer groups are petitioning the FDA to treat genetically engineered salmon as a food additive so it's evaluated with more rigor.

Food & Water Watch, Consumers Union and the Center for Food Safety on Tuesday submitted a petition asking the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to classify and evaluate AquaBounty Technologies' genetically engineered (GE) salmon and as a food additive.

Currently, the FDA classifies AquAdvantage Salmon as a new animal drug. The three consumer groups claim that the process used to create the GE salmon "substantially" alters its composition, including its nutrition value, so the fish should be treated as a food additive so it's evaluated with more rigor.

"FDA's choice to allow the first proposed transgenic animal for food to somehow only be review as a drug is contrary to law, science and common sense," said George Kimbrell, senior attorney for the Center for Food Safety. "Public health and transparency should be championed, not skirted, particularly when contemplating such an unprecedented approval."

"If FDA actually evaluated GE salmon as a food additive, including allergy-causing potential, they would not likely be able to approve it because of the health risks that have can already be seen in an incomplete set of data," added Dr. Michael Hansen, senior scientist with Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports.

Food & Water Watch Executive Director Wenonah Hauter linked GE salmon to cancer. "GE salmon may contain increased levels of IGF-1, a hormone that helps accelerate the growth of the transgenic fish and is linked to breast, colon, prostate and lung cancer," she said.

In September 2010, FDA scientists preliminary determined that AquAdvantage Salmon is safe for human consumption, but an FDA advisory committee subsequently determined that more research is needed. It's been about 16 years since AquaBounty submitted its first GE fish study to the FDA.

Last week, AquaBounty announced that it is [restructuring](#) to reduce its operating costs by approximately 30 percent and increase its cash flow, in light of the continuing uncertainty surrounding the timing of U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval.

And in December, Dr. Ronald Stotish, president and CEO of AquaBounty, [defended](#) AquAdvantage Salmon — which allow Atlantic salmon to grow to market size of about 8 pounds in just 18 months, compared to the usual 36 months — during a congressional hearing addressing the environmental risks associated with GE fish. Several West Coast legislators, including U.S. Sen. Mark Begich of Alaska, are opposed GE salmon and have introduced legislation to block its approval.

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