## `FDA Moves Forward on Genetically Engineered Salmon

(*Beyond Pesticides*, January 3, 2012) On December 21, just as everyone was gearing up for the holidays, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced its release of a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact on the genetically engineered (GE) AquaBounty AquaAdvantage salmon. The FDA action is widely viewed as confirmation that the Obama Administration is prepared to approve shortly the first GE animal intended for human consumption in the face of widespread opposition from the public.

"It is extremely disappointing that the Obama Administration continues to push approval of this dangerous and unnecessary product," said Andrew Kimbrell, executive director for Center for Food Safety. "The GE salmon has no socially redeeming value; it's bad for the consumer, bad for the salmon industry and bad for the environment. FDA's decision is premature and misguided."

AquaBounty claims that the company's process for raising GE fish is safer than traditional aquaculture, yet documents released by the Canadian government show that a new strain of Infectious Salmon Anaemia, the deadly fish flu which has been devastating fish stocks around the world, contaminated their Canadian production site. This information was not included in the FDA's review and hidden from the public. Many additional long standing concerns regarding impacts to wild species and the environment raised during a Senate hearing last year remain unanswered in the latest FDA review documents.

In order to create the transgenic fish, Aquabounty genetically engineered an Atlantic salmon by inserting a Chinook salmon growth-hormone gene, as well as a gene sequence from an ocean pout. The company claims this engineering causes the GE salmon to undergo an increase in growth rate that allows the fish to reach market size in half the normal time. Consumer groups Center for Food Safety, Food & Water Watch and Consumers Union submitted a formal petition to the agency in February 2012 to classify and evaluate the GE salmon as a food additive.

The FDA decision ignores calls from more than 40 members of the U.S. Congress who have repeatedly urged FDA to conduct more rigorous review of environmental and health safety, and halt any approval process until concerns over risks, transparency and oversight have been fully satisfied. The public filed nearly 400,000 comments demanding FDA reject this application. Additionally, more than 300 environmental, consumer, health and animal welfare organizations, salmon and fishing groups and associations, food companies, chefs and restaurants filed joint statements with FDA opposing approval.

"We need a robust regulatory system that puts environmental, human health, economic and animal welfare risks first," said Mr. Kimbrell. "Putting a GE animal on the path to consumer use without proper safeguards and with no mandatory labeling requirement proves that the system FDA has in place gives us none of that."