

My Turn: FDA wrong on Frankenfish

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Despite overwhelming opposition from scientists, consumers and fishermen, the product commonly referred to as "Frankenfish" could unknowingly be your choice for dinner as early as 2017.

For those unfamiliar with genetically engineered salmon, these products are nothing short of science fiction, recently being described as a scene from the newest "Jurassic Park" film. Genetic material from an ocean pout, an eel-like fish known for its immunity to sub-freezing waters, would be spliced with that of a Chinook (King) salmon and an Atlantic salmon. The resulting organism would grow to the size of an Alaskan king salmon in roughly half the time.

The marketplace approval of AquaBounty Technologies's GE salmon represents a major failure on the part of the FDA. For starters, the approval process failed to consider many of the negative consequences associated with GE fish. This disingenuous process, which followed the same standards for approving a new drug for animal use, never truly considered the risks associated to our wild salmon species, our ocean ecosystems and the U.S. fishing economy. To make matters worse, the FDA's decision explicitly stated that these products would not be required to be labeled as genetically engineered, leaving many American consumers in the dark.

Together, with our colleagues and a large number of American retailers and consumers, we have opposed the FDA's approval of GE salmon. These efforts have included numerous pieces of legislation to ban such products from ever reaching market and others to ensure American consumers have access to clear and transparent labeling of these GE products.

In today's global marketplace, a consumer's access to accurate ingredient information is paramount. Clear and accurate GMO labeling requirements attempt to mitigate the risks of market confusion or rejection by countries that have no interest in purchasing the hybrid organisms. Confusion among consumers about what type of salmon or seafood are genetically engineered could significantly deter shoppers from purchasing these products altogether. Ultimately, we must protect the nation's sustainable, wild-caught seafood industry from the irreparable harms a full-on market rejection of salmon as a safe and nutritious food item would cause.

Most recently, Congress has pursued legislative efforts to block states such as Alaska and Oregon from instituting mandatory labeling requirements of GE fish and seafood. Proponents of this legislation, the so-called Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act, have coalesced around the idea of adding language to an upcoming omnibus spending bill. These efforts would significantly undermine a state's right to develop labeling laws within their own jurisdictions and preempt efforts to give consumers the right to know their fish products were genetically engineered. Given the FDA's recent approval of Frankenfish, we believe this is the last thing Congress should be pursuing.

Together, we have introduced bipartisan legislation in the House that would allow American consumers to decide for themselves. HR 913, the Genetically Engineered Food Right-to-Know Act, will give consumers a clear choice when deciding which products to serve at the dinner table. The bill would require the FDA to clearly label food that has been genetically engineered or contains any genetically engineered ingredients, unless the information is clearly disclosed.

We look forward to you joining our cause to defeat the FDA's disastrous decision to approve GE salmon and at the very least our common sense proposal to give Americans the right to know what they are eating.

- Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, has been Alaska's at-large representative since 1973. He sits on the Natural Resources and the Transportation committees. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Oregon, has represented Oregon's 4th Congressional District since 1987. He sits on the Transportation Committee.

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