

SalmonState
41193 Crested Crane
Homer, Alaska 99603

March 7, 2017

Representative Louise Stutes, Chair
House Fisheries
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol (Mail Stop 3100)
Juneau AK 99801-1182

RE: HJR 12 Labeling of Genetically Engineered Foods

Dear Representative Stutes and Committee Members:

SalmonState respectfully submits its support of HJR 12, which opposes the approval of AquaBounty AquAdvantage genetically engineered salmon and urges for legislation that would require clear labeling of genetically engineered (GE) food products, including AquaBounty's GE salmon. Not only does HJR 12 uphold the wishes and concerns of the vast majority of Alaskans, millions of Americans, and hundreds of businesses that care about the sustainability of wild salmon and trout, but it also helps ensure that Americans have the basic information needed to make informed decisions about what they buy and consume.

SalmonState is an Alaska-based initiative that works to protect salmon habitat, promote fish-friendly policies, and encourage innovation and education in the salmon marketplace. We work extensively with the entire salmon supply chain, and our staff have invested years of work in educating the domestic marketplace about why wild salmon matters. Through our work it has become clear that American consumers are thoroughly confused when it comes to purchasing salmon. Having unlabeled GE salmon enter the U.S. marketplace will undoubtedly increase consumer confusion and undermine the work that Alaska has done over the decades to promote and differentiate Alaska's wild salmon and seafood.

GE salmon labeling uncertainty has the potential to turn consumers away from salmon entirely, which is a risk that Alaska's salmon industry cannot afford to pay. Alaska's salmon fishermen and businesses are already facing tremendous market pressure from imported farmed salmon, which has driven down the market value of wild salmon over the last few decades. In addition to these increased market pressures, salmon fraud and mislabeling are already reported issues in the United States. The presence of unlabeled GE salmon in the marketplace will only exacerbate this issue.

With GE salmon being the first genetically engineered animal protein approved for human consumption in the United States, it is imperative that we establish clear labeling standards for GE salmon from the outset and set a strong precedent for future GE seafood products. The American public has a right to know what they are buying and eating, especially given how little we know about the health implications and environmental risks of GE salmon. Not to mention, American consumers increasingly want to know where their food is from and how it was produced. In fact, numerous public opinion surveys in the U.S. show that up to 95% of respondents favor the labeling of GE seafood; about half consistently say they would not eat GE seafood if given a choice.

In addition to investing millions of dollars into educating buyers and consumers about wild Alaska salmon, Alaska has also committed millions of dollars and engaged in decades of research to maintain the health of its wild salmon stocks and implement sustainable wild salmon fisheries. It is crucial that our country's federal agencies support these actions by taking measures to ensure both the future sustainability of salmon stocks and the viability of Alaska's wild salmon fleets and fishing communities.

SalmonState applauds the Alaska Legislature for its previous leadership on this issue and for addressing the economic and ecologic threats that GE salmon pose to America's food system. We urge the Legislature to pass HJR 12 and help send a strong message to our nation's leaders that Alaskans will continue to stand up for informed consumers and a transparent seafood supply chain.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Bristol', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Bristol
Director, SalmonState
timsalmonstate@gmail.com