Genetically Modified Salmon Is On Its Way To Your Store

If you enjoy salmon, eat your fill now. The Food and Drug Administration has announced approval for the first genetically modified animal for consumption, and it's the Atlantic salmon…and the Pacific-Chinook salmon…and the ocean pout, a creature also known for inspiring a synthetic contribution to less-fattening ice cream, all rolled up into one sentient creation.

The possibility of a genetically engineered salmon is not an unfamiliar one, as biotech company AquaBounty has been attempting to bring the Frankenfish to the public for twenty years. The fish is said to be advantageous because it grows at twice the rate of a regular salmon and requires 75% less food. The company is not planning on letting consumers know that the fish is genetically modified, claiming that as "…the first and only, labeling is a dangerous decision. We'd like to label it as a premium product, but we'll probably introduce it as Atlantic salmon." It's ironic that they use the word dangers in conjunction with actual labeling, as the health and environmental dangers of this fish don;t seem to concern AquaBounty or the FDA.

Safety Concerns Over the Next Step in GMOs

The debate over the GM salmon from AquaBounty (officially referred to as the AquaAdvantage) has been going on for quite some time, although the approval from the FDA has shifted abstract concepts into something very real and potentially scary. Food and Water Watch and the Consumer's Union have both expressed concerns about the fish and its impact on health and the environmental threat of a possible escape. Like all GMOs,

the salmon has been labeled safe to eat by the FDA. That alone is suspect when you consider the amount of countries worldwide who are banning GMOs, but there are also concerns regarding allergies and how the mix of different fish genetics combined into one fish will affect people. Consumer's Union has been claiming that the research used to make the decision to approve the salmon suffers from inadequate analysis and a sample size that is too small.

But What if Gets Loose?

Meanwhile, Food and Water Watch is viewing the AquaAvantage from a different angle, and seeing a different problem – escape. The salmon are grown in land-based, contained tanks in Canada and Panama that are sealed completely off and all fish grown for food, as opposed to breeding, are sterile. Or at least they are sterile by FDA standards, which require 95% sterility. Setting aside the questions of what and where exactly the fish for breeding are kept (or if there is even a need for breeding fish when they're potentially raised in a lab), the FDA maintains that even if the fish were to escape, they would be unable to thrive and establish themselves. Even if the fish aren't able to sustain a population out in the natural environment, isn't it naive to assume there won't be other consequences? Wild salmon that come in contact with farmed salmon have registered a population drop of more than half due to parasites and disease. At what point does the desire for cheap salmon outweigh the increasing delicate needs of the actual wild salmon providing the genes for the Frankenfish? Despite claims that the potential of escape is highly unlikely, Food and Water Watch remains committed to making sure that GMO salmon does not reach the marketplace.

More Care is Needed in Introducing

GM Meats

The marketplace at the moment has a slightly different view from the FDA. Whole Foods and Trader Joe's have been critical of the AquaAdvantage and have publicly pledged not to sell the salmon. Other retailers like Safeway and Kroger also have no plans to stock the product. The criticism from consumer and environmental groups, as well as the lack of support from stores, have the potential to stop the forward march (swim, really) of the GMO salmon. Anything can happen within the two-year period from approval to market. If you oppose GM salmon, now is the time for your voice to be heard.

Extensive research occurs when new varieties of conventional foods like fruits and vegetables are introduced. A newly developed type of apple, for instance, takes an average of 15 years. A salmon spliced together from three different fish and altered at the base genetic level is a huge step in the food system and should not have any room for groups to claim inadequate analysis. The consequences of unleashing the Frankenfish could permanently damage the oceanic ecosystem or even play out like a science fiction movie. Do we want to be the at the mercy of our own ill-advised creation because the population is looking for cheaper salmon? At the very least we should be able to know what we're being sold.

Recommended Reading:

- *Understanding and Detoxifying Genetically Modified Foods*
- *What Vaccines and GMOs Have in Common*
- *Celebrities Against GMOs*
- *Grocery Manufacturers Association – Leading opponents of GMO labeling*
- *Wild Caught? Maybe Not – Salmon sold to you may have been farm-raised*

Sources:

- *FDA Approves GMO Salmon, A First For Food Supply. Shouldn't It Be Labeled?* – Washington Post
- *The FDA Just Approved GMO Salmon For Human Consumption* – Grub Street
- *Farmed Salmon Decimating Wild Salmon Worldwide* – National Geographic