

Food for Thought: FDA Approves Genetically Engineered Salmon

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On November 19, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [approved genetically engineered \(GE\) salmon](#) for consumption as food. AquaBounty Technologies, Inc. filed an application with the FDA for the approval of AquaAdvantage Salmon, which it claims is engineered to grow faster than regular Atlantic salmon because it combines the DNA from ocean pout salmon and a growth hormone gene from Chinook Salmon. The FDA stated that it conducted an “exhaustive and rigorous review” of the extensive data and found that AquaAdvantage Salmon is “as safe to eat as non-genetically engineered (GE) Atlantic salmon, and also as nutritious.” This is the first time the FDA approved a GE animal for consumption as food. The Center for Food Safety has vowed to challenge the FDA’s findings approving the GE salmon for consumption as food. If a lawsuit is filed, it is likely that the Center for Food Safety will also challenge the FDA’s decision not to require labels indicating that the salmon is GE. For years, the advocacy group has sought labeling requirements for all GE foods and was one of the backers of the Vermont law mandating labels for genetically modified or engineered foods. The FDA recognized that, although the law does not require that foods be labeled as genetically modified, many consumers want to know whether their food or any ingredient in the food is GE or derived from GE sources. Thus, the FDA released two guidance documents to assist manufacturers who want to voluntarily make the distinction on their food labels. The FDA does not require GE food to be labeled any differently than non-genetically modified foods unless there is a “material” difference. However, the FDA stated that the differences between regular Atlantic salmon and AquaAdvantage salmon

were not material differences because the products did not have different qualities including taste and nutrition. In fact, the FDA cited an example where the agency required additional labeling of food derived from a GE source where it found that there were “material” differences in the two versions of the food. The question remains whether manufacturers can label the GE salmon as “natural.” The FDA has repeatedly declined to define the term “natural.” Therefore, until the FDA defines the term “natural,” food manufacturers that chose to use the term when labeling GE salmon will likely face false labeling lawsuits no different than those that have plagued the industry for years.

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