

As U.S. Decision on GE Fish Nears Final Stage, Company Reveals Plan to Produce GE Salmon Eggs in Canada

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Sharratt<info@cban.ca><p>September 8, 2010. Ottawa, Halifax? Canadian groups are expressing concern that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is rushing the final stages of its process to evaluate the safety of genetically engineered (GE) salmon. According to documents released on Friday by the FDA, the company AquaBounty plans to produce all of its GE salmon eggs in Canada.</p><p>The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) has joined 30 U.S. consumer, animal welfare and environmental groups, fisheries associations and food retailers, in demanding the FDA deny approval to the GE fish. If approved for human consumption in the U.S., the GE salmon would be the first GE food animal permitted anywhere in the world. AquaBounty claims that its GE Atlantic salmon grows twice as fast as other farmed salmon.

After considering the company's request for over 10 years, the FDA released some documents just two weeks before public meetings in the U.S., September 19-21, that precede its final decision. On September 3, the FDA published an environmental assessment done by consultants hired by AquaBounty that focuses exclusively on a plant to produce all GE salmon eggs at its facility in Bay Fortune, Prince Edward Island and then ship them to Panama for growing and processing, for retail sale in the U.S. market.

The company's plan comes as a shock to Islanders, said Sharon Labchuk of Earth Action in Prince Edward Island. All this time the company has been planning to avoid production in the U.S. altogether and use its facility in PEI to supply GE salmon eggs for growing in Panama instead. I don't think Islanders want to be the source of GE fish for unwilling U.S. consumers.

By approving the fish to be raised in Canada and Panama instead of the U.S., the FDA is sidestepping a full assessment of the environmental risks, said Jaydee Hanson, policy analyst for the U.S. based Center for Food Safety. The FDA is relying on an environmental assessment done by private consultants hired by the company. Under U.S. law an environmental assessment requires a much less rigorous review than a full environmental impact statement.

The possible introduction of GE salmon raises many questions about the future implications for our marine environments and fisheries. Canada should not be offloading environmental risk to other countries while there is still so much uncertainty, said Shannon Arnold, Marine Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre Nova Scotia,

Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN), points out that Canada has not signed the international Biosafety Protocol, which governs the safe handling and transport of living modified organisms across borders. Canada could be compromising Panama's biosafety regulations and undermining the Biosafety Protocol, said Sharratt. 160 countries are Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, including Panama. Groups in Canada have been calling on the government to ratify the agreement for more than 10 years.</p><p>Sharon Labchuk, Earth Action, 902 621 0719, cell 902 940 1262; Jaydee Hanson, Center for Food Safety, 202-547-9359x24; Shannon Arnold, Ecology Action Centre, 902 446 4840; Lucy Sharratt, Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, 613 241 2267x6.</p><p>Click here for more information on GE fish.</p>