FDA approves transgenic chicken that produces lifesaving drug in its eggs

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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved a chicken that has been genetically engineered to produce a drug in its eggs.

The drug, Kanuma (sebelipase alfa), is a recombinant human enzyme marketed by Alexion Pharmaceuticals. It replaces a faulty enzyme in people with a rare, inherited condition that prevents the body from breaking down fatty molecules in cells.

Following its approval by the FDA on December 8, Kanuma joins a small group of 'farmaceuticals' on the U.S. market. In 2009, the agency approved genetically modified goats that produce an anticoagulant called ATryn (antithrombin) in their milk. And last year, the FDA authorized a drug for treating hereditary angioedema that is produced by transgenic rabbits. . .

The agency moved quickly to consider Kanuma, giving it a priority review, orphan-drug status and a breakthrough-therapy designation. The disease that it is designed to treat, lysosomal acid lipase deficiency, causes fat to accumulate in the liver, spleen and vasculature. A form of the disease that strikes infants is quickly fatal. A second form that affects older patients causes liver enlargement, fibrosis and cirrhosis, as well as cardiovascular disease. . .

Unlike the genetically engineered AquAdvantage salmon that was approved by the FDA last month, the transgenic chickens that produce Kanuma are not intended to enter the food supply. . .

The FDA says that the chickens are not likely to accidentally enter the food supply or adversely affect the environment because they are raised in indoor facilities.

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