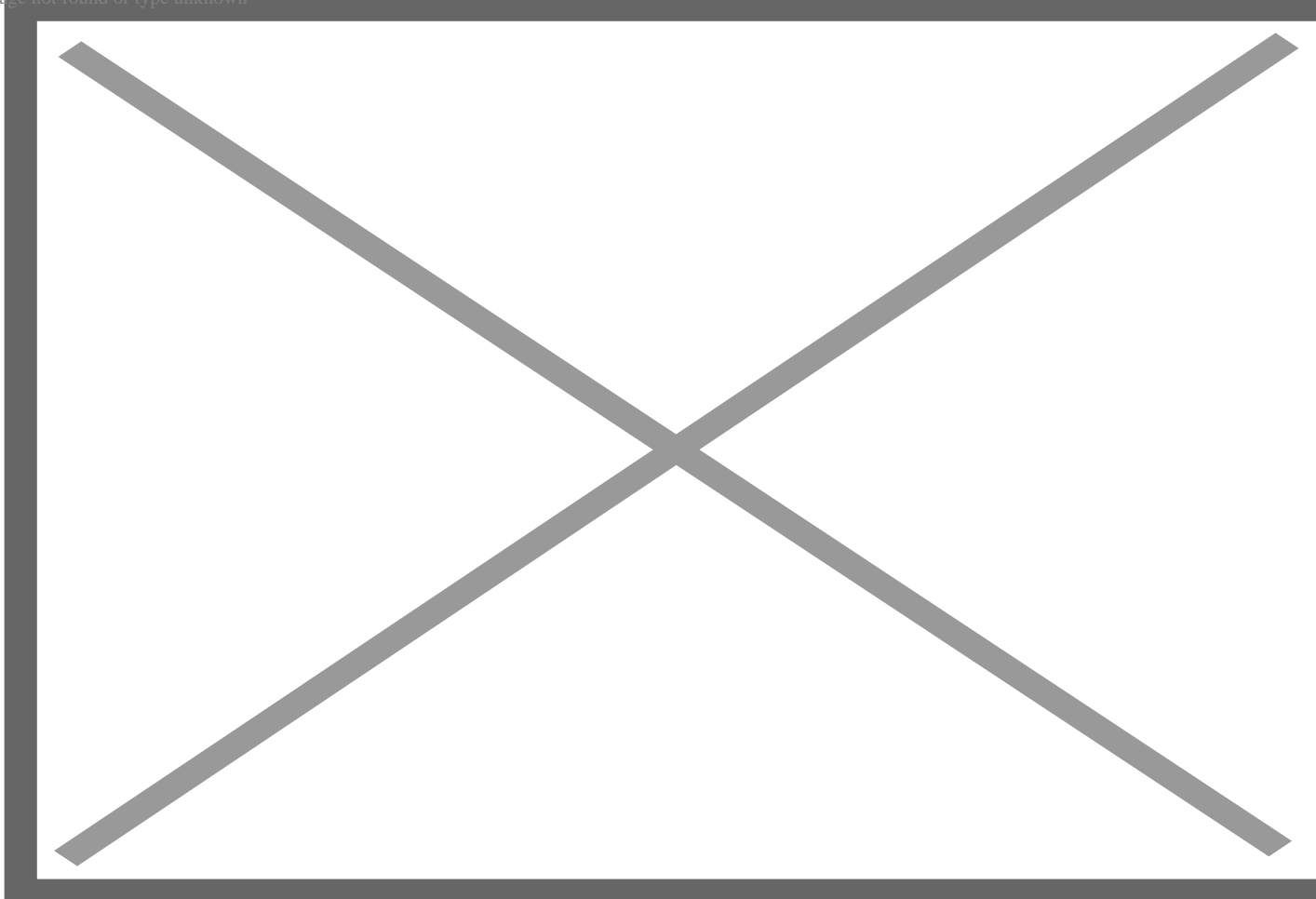


Anti-GMO activists launch final effort to block AquaBounty's fast-growing, sustainable GM salmon as US sales loom

As biotech firm AquaBounty prepares to harvest its GE AquAdvantage salmon for sale in the US, activist groups have trotted out long-refuted arguments in a bid to stir up consumer opposition. Here's everything you need to know.

The world's first genetically engineered (GE) animal, a fast-growing Atlantic salmon, is [slated to hit the US market](#) in less than a month. But getting this far has been no small matter for AquaBounty, the biotech firm that developed the fish. The company has battled litigious [anti-GMO activist groups](#) and [technophobic politicians](#) for more than 20 years, all while navigating the FDA's byzantine regulatory system, which treats [intentional DNA alterations](#) in GE animals as veterinary drugs.

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Credit: AquaBounty

With commercialization perhaps just weeks away, AquaBounty's activist critics haven't given up the fight. The alternative medicine [lobbying outfit](#) Alliance for Natural Health (ANH), for example, is trying to rally

support for a final push against AquaBounty. How does ANH's "action alert" stand up to the facts? [Let's take a look.](#)

"In a recent online press conference, a chief executive for AquaBounty said that its genetically engineered salmon would be on sale to the US public in April, adding that seven out of ten consumers might buy GE salmon, presumably once they learned more about it."

This is one of the few accurate statements in the group's alert, and it's worth dwelling on for a minute. In a recent survey, the question found that consumers seem to drop their objections to GE fish after learning about why they're being introduced. Fast-growing salmon require less feed than their conventional counterparts and are raised in the US, [enabling important](#) downstream environmental benefits and [reducing food prices](#) for consumers. It's not surprising that people find such outcomes acceptable, especially as we work our way out of pandemic-induced lockdowns that have [crushed many Americans](#) economically.

"Note that, due to the sham GE food labeling law that Congress passed, the GE salmon would not be required to have clear labeling that it was genetically altered."

The USDA's [National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Standard](#) (NBFDS) is arguably incoherent; some experts have noted the [odd exemptions](#) made for different products throughout the regulation. But AquaBounty CEO Sylvia Wulf said during the press briefing that they [were committed](#) to labeling AquAdvantage salmon for the sake of transparency. Warning consumers that the company "would not be required" to label its product is irrelevant and misleading.

"The sale and production of GE salmon makes the issue of transgenic contamination—when GE species contaminate non-GE plants or animals—even worse."

Incorrect. The fish are raised in an Indiana facility that features redundant security measures, almost to the point of absurdity. Consider the FDA's [assessment](#):

"Physical containment at the Indiana facility is augmented by operational containment (standard operating procedures and operational plans), security measures (e.g., perimeter fencing) and ongoing surveillance (e.g., cameras and recording devices) ... Containment measures can include the use of mechanical devices, either stationary or moving (e.g., tanks, screens, filters, covers, nets, etc.), or in some cases, the use of lethal temperatures or chemicals to prevent uncontrolled escape."

All production units in the facility will have a minimum of five independent levels of physical containment (i.e., barriers) preventing escape of eggs or fish via effluent flow paths to the outside environment and some of the production units will have six or seven barriers in place. This number of containment levels is more than adequate and greater than the number at most fish production facilities.”

In sum, those fish almost certainly aren't going anywhere. Even if they did, the FDA noted, all the salmon are sterile females, [meaning](#) “the possibility of their reproducing in the wild is likewise extremely remote.”

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Back to the Alliance for Natural Health:

“We recently reported on a case in which the court ruled that the FDA violated environmental laws in approving genetically engineered (GE) salmon.”

“Violated environmental laws” sounds ominous, but all the judge [actually said](#) was that the FDA needed to more [thoroughly assess](#) what would happen if the sterile fish were to escape their inland facility and, perhaps, flop their way to a body of water, which hasn't happened once in the 20-plus years AquaBounty has been raising salmon.

Despite this final legal wrangling, NHA begrudgingly acknowledged, “The court's ruling does not seem to substantially threaten AquaBounty's plans to sell the salmon.” That's correct, and it's very good news for everyone who cares about sustainable food production and cheaper prices at the grocery store.

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