Alliance for Natural Health USA
1350 Connecticut Ave NW
5th Floor
Washington DC 20036

email: office@anh-usa.org
tel: 800.230.2762
fax: 202.315.5837
www.anh-usa.org

ANH-USA is a regional office of ANH-Int
INTERNATIONAL
anhinternational.org

-Press Release-

Contact: Darrell Rogers
For immediate release: September 1, 2010
voice: 202.255.0527
email: drogers@anh-usa.org

FDA Thinks This Fish Can't Fail!

Food and Drug Admin Fast-Tracks Approval of
Genetically Modified Salmon through a Rigged Process

September 1, 2010 (Washington, DC) — Last week the FDA announced two sets of hearings on a new genetically modified fish, called AquAdvantage salmon. The first hearing will determine whether the fish may be sold for human consumption; the second, whether the fish (if approved) must be labeled as genetically engineered or not. The FDA asked the pubic and experts to weigh in on this controversial issue with the potential for serious public health and safety ramifications. But here's the catch:

- The FDA-scheduled hearings are in less than four weeks; and
- The FDA has not released scientific information on the genetically modified salmon to the public.

"This is the first time the FDA has ever reviewed a genetically modified animal engineered for human consumption—yet they are not giving the scientific community or the American public any real information, and allowing only four weeks to respond, is decidedly fishy," said Gretchen DuBeau, executive director of the Alliance for Natural Health USA. "Can you imagine telling a prosecutor or defense lawyer that the evidence would be withheld until the trial?"

The salmon is a regular Atlantic salmon whose genes have been spliced with one gene from a Chinook salmon, to make it grow to maturity twice as fast, and one antifreeze protein gene from the ocean pout—an eel-like creature from an entirely different family of marine organisms.

Red flags were raised last week when the FDA released the notice of the two meetings only two days apart. "It's clear they think that this genetically engineered salmon will easily pass the FDA approval process—that it can't fail—considering the fact that the second meeting two days later is to decide if the salmon should be labeled genetically modified or not. The FDA should at least attempt to look like they are doing their job," DuBeau said.

This is not the first time the FDA has rushed to approve a GMO, or genetically modified organism, that was later found to be dangerous or materially different than its natural alternative. For example, the Flavr Savr tomato was genetically engineered in the early 1990s by Calgene, Inc. (now owned by Monsanto); it was designed to stay fresh on store shelves longer than regular tomatoes. Even though the FDA's own scientific advisers were concerned over Calgene's findings—their studies showed stomach lesions in lab rats that ingested the GM tomato—the Flavr Savr went to market.

The Flavr Savr's manufacturers willingly labeled the tomato as genetically engineered, though the FDA did not require it. "And not doing so was a violation of the FDA's mandate—they must require labeling if the product is materially different from its natural version," DuBeau said. "In this case, not only were there significant 'material differences' between it and a non-GM tomato in terms of its taste, its risk of fungal diseases, and other physical problems, but more importantly, the Flavr Savr tomato was never deemed safe!" The tomato was withdrawn from the market in 1997.

"The problem, of course, is that we don't yet know what negative health effects such bio-engineering might cause in the salmon," DuBeau continued. "We do know that other genetically modified foods affect the physiology in negative ways. One example: Filipinos who ate GM corn developed antibodies to Bt toxin, as well as a resistance to the antibiotic ampicillin. Another example: GM soy made hamsters sterile, but that the effect did not hit until the third generation—a frightening thought if it applies to humans. It also made hair grow in the hamsters' mouths!"

The fish has been created by AquaBounty Technologies of Boston, Massachusetts, and was developed over the past fourteen years at a cost of $50 million. "We are hoping that the FDA has learned from their pervious mistakes and will not rush this genetically engineered animal to our dinner plates without the proper amount of unbiased scientific input and public notice," DuBeau concluded. "The lack of peer-reviewed scientific studies on this fish is worrisome in the extreme, and the American public must, at minimum, be told what they're eating. The lack of a labeling mandate means we might soon be eating this 'frankenfish' without even knowing it."

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