

Concerns raised over GMO salmon

The labels to read 'bioengineered'

By COURTNEY FLATT
Northwest Public Broadcasting



AquaBounty Technologies
By engineering a regular Atlantic salmon, front, with a Chinook gene that instructs growth hormones, AquaBounty can produce a faster-growing genetically modified salmon, back.

Genetically engineered salmon are one step closer to winding up on store shelves, after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration lifted an import ban. It's a move that's concerning to tribes, food groups and environmentalists.

The new guidelines don't require labeling the fish as "genetically engineered," rather the labels will read "bioengineered." The term is a little less loaded, said Amy van Saun, a staff attorney for the Center for Food Safety.

"It might be a symbol that says 'BE' or it might even be a QR code that you have to actually scan with a smartphone in order to get more information to find out if it's genetically engineered," van Saun said. "So it's quite a bit more burdensome. It doesn't really give people the information on whether or not the fish is genetically engineered when they look at it in the grocery store."

The FDA will now allow AquaBounty to import its AquaAdvantage Salmon eggs to a land-based facility in Indiana, where the salmon can be grown for food.

The salmon have been genetically engineered to grow faster than farm-raised Atlantic salmon. The FDA first approved genetically engineered salmon as safe to eat in 2015. This was the first time the administration had approved a genetically engineered animal for human consumption.

On its website, AquaBounty says all its eggs produce sterile females "making it impossible for them to breed among themselves and with other salmon. In addition, FDA approval requires them to be grown in physically contained land-based systems, further reducing any potential impact on wild populations."

According to an FDA fact sheet, "The salmon are safe to eat, the introduced DNA

is safe for the fish itself, and the salmon meet the sponsor's claim about faster growth."

Congress held off the FDA's ruling until guidelines were in place that would label the fish as genetically engineered.

The Center for Food Safety argues a "bioengineered" label does not meet those guidelines.

Groups have raised concerns over the environmental harm they say genetically engineered salmon could cause.

"Farmed fish escape. Even though they're in these land-based facilities (in Indiana), there's still potential for escape," van Saun said. "Once we have these novel, new types of organisms out there, there's no way to call them back."

Van Saun said the fish could compete with native salmon for food and resources. They could prey on native salmon. Or they could interbreed and cause genetic changes in wild salmon.

"What concerns us the most is potential expansion into net pen aquaculture in the ocean, which is how it's done. There will definitely be escapes if that ever happens," van Saun said.

Northwest tribes said the FDA did not consult with them about concerns with genetically engineered salmon.

"The FDA's unilateral decision, without tribal consultation, is an alarming signal that our sacred and prized wild salmon is now even more vulnerable to external markets and ecological threats," said Fawn Sharp, president of the Quinault Indian Nation, in a statement. "It's unconscionable and arrogant to think man can improve upon our creator's perfection in wild salmon as a justification and excuse to satisfy corporate ambition and greed."

Valerie Segrest, a Muckleshoot tribal member and executive director of Feed Seven Generations, said this move "has directly attacked the life ways of Pacific Northwest tribal communities."

Washington is latest state to sue major opioid distributors

By GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Washington on Tuesday became the latest state to sue major distributors of opioids, saying the companies made billions of dollars while ignoring signs of a growing crisis fueled by addiction to the drugs.

Attorney General Bob Ferguson filed the lawsuit in King County Superior Court in Seattle against San Francisco-based McKesson Corp.; Dublin, Ohio-based Cardinal Health Inc.; and Chesterbrook, Pennsylvania-based AmerisourceBergen Drug Corp. The companies shipped huge amounts of oxycodone, fentanyl and other painkillers into Washington and failed to comply with requirements that they identify suspicious orders that could be diverted to the illegal drug market and report them to law enforcement, he said.

"For years these companies illegally shipped suspicious orders into our state," Ferguson told a news conference. "Their conduct, put quite simply, fueled the state's opioid epidemic."

The attorney general's office said Washington is the 10th state to sue at least one of the distributors.

Washington is also among the states suing opioid manufacturers like Purdue Pharma. In all, government entities including states, cities and American Indian tribes have filed more than 1,000 lawsuits against drugmakers, distributors and others involved in the opioid crisis. The first test claims are set to go to trial later this year in a massive, consolidated federal court case in Ohio.

From 2006 to 2017, more than 8,000 Washington residents died of opioid overdoses — more than died in car accidents or shootings, Ferguson said. During much of that time, the companies were flooding the state with more than 2 billion opioid pills, he said.

The attorney general highlighted rural Pend Oreille County in Washington's northeastern corner. In 2014, he said, the companies sent enough opioids to the county to supply each of its roughly 13,000 resi-

dents with dozens of pills. The companies have said they are taking steps to help address the crisis and noted that they fulfill prescription orders placed by properly licensed health care providers.

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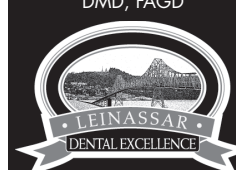
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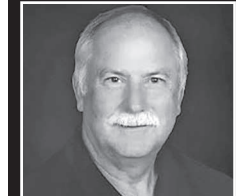
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