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FDA Sued Over Approval Of Genetically Engineered Salmon

Opponents are concerned about what could happen to wild salmon if the engineered fish were released into the wild.

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- [Chris D'Angelo](#) Associate Editor, HuffPost Hawaii

- **Plaintiffs argue the federal agency overstepped its authority in approving the genetically modified fish.**
- **Produced by AquaBounty Technologies, the salmon are engineered to grow twice as fast as wild species.**
- **Critics worry engineered salmon could prove disastrous for wild salmon populations.**

Nearly a dozen fishing and environmental groups have [filed suit](#) against the Food and Drug Administration in an effort to block its recent [approval of genetically modified salmon](#).

The plaintiffs, represented by the [Center for Food Safety](#) and [Earthjustice](#), argue that by green-lighting the first-ever genetically altered animal slated for human consumption, the FDA violated the law and ignored potential risks to wild salmon populations, the environment and fishing communities.

“That’s one of the major risks here, is the escape of these fish into the wild,” George Kimbrell, senior attorney for Center for Food Safety, told The Huffington Post. “It could be a final blow to our already imperiled salmon stocks.”

Produced by Massachusetts-based company [AquaBounty Technologies](#), the AquAdvantage Salmon is an Atlantic salmon engineered with genes from a Pacific Chinook salmon and a deep water ocean eelpout to [grow twice as fast](#) as its conventional counterpart.



Handout / Reuters An AquAdvantage Salmon is pictured in this undated photo provided by AquaBounty Technologies.

The 64-page lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, [challenges whether the FDA has authority to regulate genetically modified animals](#) as “animal drugs” under the 1938 Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act. It also argues the agency failed to protect the environment and consult wildlife agencies in its review process, as required by federal law, CFS said in a release.

“I think it’s important to note that FDA has gone ahead with this approval over the objections of over 2 million Americans in the comment period,” Kimbrell told HuffPost.

In its [approval announcement](#) in November, the FDA said it determined “food from AquAdvantage Salmon is as safe to eat and as nutritious as food from other non-GE Atlantic salmon and that there are no biologically relevant differences in the nutritional profile of AquAdvantage Salmon compared to that of other farm-raised Atlantic salmon.”

FDA spokeswoman Juli Putnam told HuffPost in an email that as a matter of policy, the federal agency does not comment on pending litigation.



SAUL LOEB via Getty Images Fresh Atlantic salmon steaks and fillets at Eastern Market in Washington, D.C. in 2013.

The lawsuit is the latest development in an ongoing and heated debate over genetically modified organisms, their safety and [whether genetically engineered foods should be labeled](#). While proponents say the technology allows agricultural farmers to be more efficient, opponents argue they result in heavy pesticide use and transgenic contamination.

In the case of its GE salmon, AquaBounty says the fish grows to market size [using 25 percent less feed](#) than any Atlantic salmon on the market today.

But if the engineered fish were to be released into the wild — a risk AquaBounty says is [eliminated by raising them on land](#) and away from the ocean — critics worry they might outcompete endangered wild salmon for food and introduce new diseases.

“Once they escape, you [can’t put these transgenic fish back in the bag](#),” Dune Lankard, a salmon fisherman and the Center for Biological Diversity’s Alaska representative, said in a release. “They’re manufactured to outgrow wild salmon, and if they cross-breed, it could have irreversible impacts on the natural world. This kind of dangerous tinkering could easily morph into a disaster for wild salmon that will be impossible to undo.”

Plaintiffs in the case include Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, Institute for Fisheries Resources, Golden Gate Salmon Association, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay and others.