Media Background **April 10, 2013**

Genetically Modified (GM) Atlantic Salmon in PEI

Company wants PEI as sole global supplier of first-ever GM food animal

PEI could soon be the world's first and sole supplier of genetically modified (GM) Atlantic salmon eggs.

If approved, this GM salmon would be the first GM food animal in the world, and the first GM fish.

Genetic modification (also called genetic engineering or rDNA technology) is a controversial new technology that allows for the transfer of genetic material directly from one organism to another (across the species and kingdom barriers) at the molecular level, and is dramatically different from animal breeding, with new risks and unpredictable impacts on the organism.

The GM salmon is engineered with genetic material from other species

The Atlantic salmon has been engineered with a growth hormone gene from Chinook salmon and genetic material from ocean pout (an eel-like creature), to grow faster than other farmed salmon.

Decision to approve the GM salmon is imminent

The US Food and Drug Administration is close to a final decision on the GM salmon. A public comment period in the US was recently extended because of the controversy, but will end on April 26, 2013.

Environment Canada could announce approval for the production of GM salmon eggs in PEI any day. Health Canada could also be considering a request to approve the GM fish. The entire regulatory process is secret, including any timeline for approval.

US company AquaBounty plans PEI-Panama-US route for GM fish

The small US company AquaBounty maintains a research and development facility at Bay Fortune PEI. The company currently proposes to produce all its GM Atlantic salmon eggs there, to be shipped to Panama for grow out and processing for export into the US consumer market as "table-ready" fish.

The company has publicly stated its intentions to produce the GM fish in countries around the world including the US and Chile.

The GM salmon poses a risk to wild Atlantic salmon populations

If approved, the GM Atlantic salmon would pose a risk to wild Atlantic salmon populations which are endangered around the world.

- Escape of farmed fish from marine net pens or hatcheries is already a serious, reoccurring problem that threatens wild species.

- AquaBounty says it will only grow out the GM fish in land-based facilities, but, as production expands, the GM salmon could be grown in ocean-based fish farms across the world.

- The company says that all the GM fish will be sterile females but also admits that up to 5% may be able to reproduce. Even if only 1% remain fertile, escape from confinement would pose a significant environmental threat.

- Research from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans relating to Coho salmon found that GM salmon are more aggressive and can outcompete wild salmon for food.

The GM salmon could pose a risk to human health

- According to AquaBounty's own research (released in summary form by the US Food and Drug Administration), the GM salmon has elevated levels of IGF-1, a hormone linked to a number of cancers.

- Additionally, the company research shows an increased risk of allergic reaction.

There is significant opposition in the food and aquaculture industry

- The aquaculture industry says it doesn't support GM fish because there is no market demand.

- Several major U.S. grocery chains recently signed a pledge not to sell any GM fish, including Trader Joe's and Whole Foods. US polls show that 91% of consumers do not want to eat the GM fish.

There is public opposition in Canada

75 organizations in Canada say they oppose GM fish, including the David Suzuki Foundation, Wild Salmon First, the Fundy Baykeeper, Living Oceans Society, and the United Church of Canada.

The state of Alaska is opposed to the release of the GM salmon

Fisher associations in Alaska including the Alaska Trollers Association and conservation groups including the Alaska Marine Conservation Council strongly oppose the approval of the GM salmon.

On March 25, 2013, the Alaskan Senate unanimously passed a resolution opposing the GM salmon, calling on the U.S. States Congress to fully examine the issue, and asking that, if approved, the GM salmon be labeled as genetically modified. The resolution was brought forward by Representative Geran Tarr of Anchorage. The Alaskan Senate and House of Representatives both passed the resolution unanimously.

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