

Oppose GE Salmon: Support Northwest Tribal Food Sovereignty

Join CAGJ's Solidarity Campaign with Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project to reject GE Salmon



CAGJ's Food Justice Project has been engaged in the struggle against genetically engineered (GE) salmon since 2015. That year we partnered with Friends of the Earth in a successful campaign to pressure Costco to commit to not selling GE salmon. The FDA gave the green light in late 2015, making salmon the first-ever GE animal to be approved for human consumption anywhere in the world.

In 2016 CAGJ began working in solidarity with Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project to amplify the efforts of Northwest tribes to reject this affront to our collective ecological, cultural and economic well-being.

What is GE Salmon?

AquaAdvantage Salmon is an Atlantic salmon developed by the transnational biotech corporation AquaBounty Technologies by artificially combining growth hormone genes from Chinook salmon and DNA from the anti-freeze genes of an eel-like ocean pout. This modification causes the production of a growth hormone year-round, creating a fish that the company claims grows at twice the rate of conventionally farmed salmon. The safety of AquaAdvantage salmon – from both an ecological and public health standpoint – has been called into question by multiple prominent environmental and food safety groups. The Quinault Nation, a Northwest tribe, has joined 11 of these organizations in a lawsuit against the FDA.

Supporting Northwest Tribal Opposition to the Introduction of GE Salmon

Salmon is keystone species for this region; our entire ecological system depends on this anadromous fish, which migrates out to sea and back into our river basins each year. This strong connection between salmon and the Northwest is a legacy of Coast Salish fisheries management over millennia.

Northwest tribes have voiced strong concerns about the potential impacts of corporations producing and distributing GE salmon. Valerie Segrest, Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project founder, explains that “the Coast Salish people have organized their lives around salmon for thousands of years” and “corporate ownership of such a cultural keystone is a direct attack on our identity and the legacy our ancestors have left us.” Virginia Cross, Muckleshoot Tribal Council Chair, has stated “genetically engineered salmon not only threaten our way of life, but could also adversely affect our treaty rights to take fish at our usual and accustomed places.”

“The Coast Salish people have organized their lives around salmon for thousands of years.”
Valerie Segrest,
Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project

Corporate techno-fixes to environmental issues are often band-aids that do not address underlying ecological problems. AquaBounty claims its GE technology is a way to provide salmon to the world at a time when the species faces huge population declines. Mike Crewson of the Tulalip Tribes Natural Resource Department speaks to that shortsighted logic: “Cheaper, quickly-maturing, genetically-engineered salmon grown in hatcheries are just another gimmick that takes the focus off of the need to protect and restore salmon habitat and rebuild self-sustaining wild salmon populations. Essentially, this undermines the Tribes’ and other’s salmon recovery focus on rebuilding natural salmon runs by restoring habitat and protecting the environment needed to support healthy natural and hatchery production.”

To address these concerns, some of Washington’s Treaty Tribes and other regional tribes organized to block the approval of GE salmon to protect Salmon Nation, including these actions:

- The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians called on the FDA to deny all applications to distribute genetically engineered salmon in the U.S. without prior completion of an Environmental Impact Statement and scientific review that sufficiently consulted with Northwest Treaty Tribes. This legal requirement was not honored.
- The National Congress of American Indians joined this effort, and passed a resolution to “oppose the introduction of and sale of genetically engineered salmon in the United States if the FDA decides to allow it and requests tribal consultation on the matter before any action by the FDA.” Tribes were never consulted.
- In July 2016, Quinault Nation joined 11 other organizations to bring a lawsuit against the FDA for approving AquaBounty’s genetically engineered salmon.
- In late 2015, the Yurok Tribe in California passed a tribal ordinance banning genetically engineered salmon from their territory to protect Klamath River salmon.

Honor Indigenous Food Sovereignty

We live on Coast Salish land. Those of us who are non-Native U.S. citizens are treaty partners with Coast Salish tribes, who have observed and sustained this invaluable fishery for thousands of years. We believe that as we collectively consider the implications of GE salmon entering our food system, tribal perspectives should be at the center of that discussion.

Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. Farmers and fisherfolk play a vital and indispensable role in our communities and as stewards of the environment; agricultural and fisheries food sovereignty upholds people and the planet over corporate control.



CAGJ Partnerships

CAGJ is honored to partner with Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project to raise awareness about the implications of GE salmon for the Northwest. We are grateful to Muckleshoot Tribe Charity Fund for a grant to enable CAGJ to work on this critical issue. CAGJ also partners with Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, a national organization led by fishermen building a broad movement toward healthy fisheries and fishing communities, and Loki Fish Co, a Seattle-based family fishing company who is a longtime supporter of CAGJ.

Get Involved!

- **Want to volunteer to support the campaign?** Contact CAGJ’s Food Justice Project to get involved!
- **Pressure Congress to Reject GE Salmon:** Write letters to your Congressional Representatives calling on them to protect Washington from GE salmon, and to require strong labeling laws.
- **Get Campaign Updates:** Connect via CAGJ’s E-News, Facebook page and listservs.
- **Watch our Film:** CAGJ’s short film on GE salmon and NW tribal fishing rights will be produced in 2017.
- **Learn more:** Find Resources on GE Salmon and Northwest Native resistance on CAGJ’s website!
- **Become a Member of CAGJ:** Sign up on our website to support CAGJ with your time and/or money.