

# ENVIRONMENTAL VIEWS

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## GREENS NOW BETRAY THE WILD FISH

BY DENNIS T. AVERY

Churchville VA—The Food and Drug Administration just approved genetically modified salmon, which grow larger and faster than wild salmon. That's excellent. There are only so many wild fish in the seas, and biotech salmon could help save wild salmon fisheries from crashing.

The world's fishermen can't catch more than the 90 million tons for per year they've been getting recently. Doctors meanwhile tell 7 billion people to eat more healthful fish. All over the world, the big increase in fish consumption since 1980 has come from fish farming. Today, 90 percent of the salmon eaten in the U.S. is farmed, here or overseas.

Prices for wild salmon are already too high for most households, and this will worsen as wild fish catches fall farther behind potential demand. Without farmed fish, we'll see "fish poaching" such as threatens the rhinoceros and elephant. Or more of the mislabeling that is already common. Biotech salmon should help bring the health benefits of salmon within the reach of everyone.

The AquaAdvantage salmon get their extra genes from two other fish, one of them the related Coho species of salmon. The other is from the ocean pout, which has a gene that provides "anti-freeze" and lets the fish eat and grow even in the winter. The Coho salmon provides a gene that reinforces the modified salmon's own growth hormone. As a result, the biotech fish grow up to 11 times faster than wild fish, and grow larger.

The FDA had long ago decided the biotech fish posed no unusual health risks to consumers and would make more fish available to more people at less cost through the century ahead. Alarmists, however, say the biotech fish will escape and contaminate the wild population. They also imply that our "maximum fishing" is a signal of human "overpopulation." It's not. But if it were, it is hard to see how having more salmon available to poorer populations in New York will increase family size decisions.

The world's birth rate has already dropped from the historic 6 births per woman to about 2.5 births, and is set to start shrinking the human population soon after 2050. The UN Low Variant (which has been predictive in the past) projects human numbers falling from a peak of 8–9 billion in 2050 to 6.2 billion in 2100—and only 2.3 billion by 2300!

Could biotech salmon threaten the wild salmon populations? The FDA says it can't see how. The biotech fish will be sterile, except for a small breeding stock kept in tanks on land, under tight guard. The sterile market salmon would be also grown on land, rather than in netted ocean pens.

Society's real problem is to feed that peak population without destroying the world's wild fisheries, eroding all its cropland and plowing down most of its wildlife habitat to produce our food in the meantime. Fish farming and high-yield crops are two big parts of the answer. Stanford University recently estimated that higher-yield crops have saved 6.6 million square miles of wildlife habitat from becoming poor cropland since 1960. That's the land area of South America, far more conservation success than the Sierra Club can claim.

Instead, the environmentalists offer "solutions" like organic farming and banning the healthful new biotech salmon. One alarmist website actually calls the FDA "lapdogs" for the salmon approval. Unfortunately, this is a pattern. The environmental movement has opposed nitrogen fertilizer, all synthetic pesticides, and even the genetically modified "gold rice," which would save millions of little kids from blindness! All opposed with no evidence of harm. The lower yields from organic-only farming would mean severe hunger privation for hundreds of millions of people. Rest assured, tomorrow's parents *will* feed their children, one way or another, even if they have to plow down the rain forests, put every remaining gorilla in a stew pot, and take every fish out of the ocean.

The land taken for farming is humanity's biggest intrusion on nature. Thankfully, the world's cropland has barely expanded at all since 1980, due to better seeds (some of them biotech) and nitrogen fertilizer. Now, if allowed to do so, biotech salmon can protect one of the critical fisheries, even as we consume more protective omega 3 fatty acids.

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