WASHINGTON, D.C. — What's for dinner? Before long, it may well be genetically modified salmon, the first such altered animal cleared for people to eat in the United States.

Critics of genetically modified foods say the new salmon is a "Frankenfish," after the Frankenstein monster. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), however, approved it on Thursday, saying the fish is safe to eat. It could be in grocery stores in just a couple of years.

The new fish is called AquAdvantage Salmon.

There are no major differences in how healthy AquAdvantage Salmon is compared with other farm-raised salmon, the FDA said.

**Fish Reaches Sale Size Sooner**

The FDA has hesitated in approving the salmon for more than five years because of citizens' concerns about genetically modified foods. The fish grows twice as fast as regular salmon, reaching the size it needs to be when sold more quickly than regular salmon.
AquaBounty, a company in Massachusetts, designed the new salmon. Ron Stotish is the company's CEO. He said that the fish is a "game changer that brings healthy and nutritious food to consumers in an environmentally responsible manner without damaging the ocean and other marine habitats."

It takes the salmon about two years to grow, so the product should be available in grocery stores in that time, AquaBounty said.

Once the salmon reach stores, consumers may not know they are eating them because there are no essential differences between an engineered and a normal salmon. The FDA says the law does not require the fish be labeled as engineered. Genetically modified salmon have the same flavor, texture, color and smell as the typical fish, AquaBounty says.

**Guidelines Set For Optional Labeling**

The FDA has set up guidelines for stores who do want to label the fish, along with additional guidance for voluntary labeling of genetically modified plant foods.

Some retailers have said they will not sell the fish at all. Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Target and Kroger have all said they are not planning to sell AquAdvantage Salmon.

Critics have tried to persuade retailers to reject the salmon, because they worry it could cause allergies in people. They also fear it could lead to the eventual decimation of the natural salmon population if it escapes into the wild.

"There’s no place on our dinner plates for genetically engineered fish," said Lisa Archer. She works with the environmental advocacy group Friends of the Earth. "We will continue to work to ensure the market, from grocery retailers to restaurants, continues to listen to the majority of consumers that do not want to eat this poorly studied, unlabeled genetically engineered fish."

Just hours after the announcement, another advocacy group, The Center for Food Safety, said it would take legal action against the FDA to stop the fish from being approved.

**Alaska Senator Fears Harm To Industry**

Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski, a Republican, has said the engineered salmon could harm her state's wild salmon industry. She took to the Senate floor to criticize the FDA shortly after the announcement, saying she was "spitting mad." She and other Alaska and Pacific Northwest lawmakers said they will swiftly push for legislation to mandate labeling of the modified fish.

The FDA said the salmon will be allowed to be raised only in land-based, contained hatchery tanks at two facilities in Canada and Panama, and that other facilities in the U.S. or elsewhere cannot breed or raise the salmon for human consumption. Those restrictions limit the amount of food the company can produce.
The agency said that there are “multiple and repeating levels of physical barriers” in the facilities to prevent the escape of fish. The fish would be bred to be female and to not be able to reproduce, so if any did escape, they should not be able to breed.

**Salmon Gets Growth Hormone, "On" Switch**

The salmon has an added growth hormone from the Pacific Chinook salmon that allows that fish to make growth hormone all year long. Engineers have been able to keep the hormone active by using another gene from an eel-like fish called an ocean pout. The gene acts like an "on" switch. Typical Atlantic salmon produce the growth hormone for only part of the year.

Bernadette Dunham, director of the FDA’s Center for Veterinary Medicine, said the agency “has thoroughly analyzed and evaluated the data and information” submitted by AquaBounty. To approve an engineered animal for human consumption, the agency reviews a company’s data and must determine that the food is safe to eat, that the engineering is safe for the fish and that the company’s claim is accurate. In this case, the company’s claim is the speed of growth for the salmon.

AquaBounty’s Stotish said he is hopeful the fish will gain consumer acceptance as people learn more about it.

"We think time and education and information may allow many of these folks to change their mind," he said of critics.