

FDA approves genetically engineered potatoes, apples as safe

March 20 2015, by Mary Clare Jalonick And Keith Ridler



This undated handout photo provided by Okanagan Specialty Fruits shows an Arctic® Granny, left, Arctic® Golden, right, and Arctic® Granny slices. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Friday approved the genetically engineered foods as safe, saying they are as nutritious as their conventional counterparts. The approval covers six varieties of potatoes by Boise, Idaho-based J. R. Simplot Co. and two varieties of apples from the Canadian company Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc. (AP Photo/Okanagan Specialty Fruits)

Potatoes that won't bruise and apples that won't brown are a step closer

to grocery store aisles, but some food suppliers say they don't want any part of it and others are staying silent.

The Food and Drug Administration on Friday approved the genetically engineered foods, saying they are "as safe and nutritious as their conventional counterparts."

The approval covers six varieties of potatoes by Boise, Idaho-based J. R. Simplot Co. and two varieties of apples from the Canadian company Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc.

Genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, refers to food grown from seeds that are genetically engineered in a lab. Aware of potential resistance from consumers, Simplot officials say Innate potato traits come exclusively from genes from domestic potato varieties.

However, one of the company's oldest business partners—McDonald's—said it won't use the potatoes.

"McDonald's USA does not source GMO potatoes nor do we have current plans to change our sourcing practice," the company said in a statement Friday.

Burger King and Wendy's declined to comment.

Okanagan, based in British Columbia, wants to make apples a more convenient snack with its non-browning version. The company says bagged apples wouldn't have to be washed in antioxidants like they are now, a process that can affect taste. Company founder Neal Carter said Okanagan wants to see bagged apples become as prolific as bagged baby carrots.

"We know that in a convenience-driven world, a whole apple is too big

of a commitment," Carter said.



This undated handout photo provided by Simplot Corporation shows modified potatoes. Potatoes that won't bruise and apples that won't brown are a step closer to grocery store aisles. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Friday approved the genetically engineered foods as safe, saying they are as nutritious as their conventional counterparts. The approval covers six varieties of potatoes by Boise, Idaho-based J. R. Simplot Co. and two varieties of apples from the Canadian company Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc. (AP Photo/Simplot Corporation)

The apples are dubbed Arctic Apples, and Carter said he wants them to be labeled as such. The first two varieties will be Granny Smith and Golden Delicious. Carter said there won't be significant plantings until

2017.

Simplot calls its potatoes Innate and the varieties selected include Ranger Russet, Russet Burbank and Atlantic.

"We're trying to improve potatoes so everyone gets a better experience, just like it's right out of the field," said Haven Baker, vice president of plant sciences for Simplot.

But it could be years before the average customer is able to buy one. The company has about 400 acres of Innate potatoes in storage from the 2014 harvest that it plans to deliver to growers, packers and shippers to be sent to a tightly-controlled network for use in small-scale test markets.

The company said those markets haven't been determined, and it's not clear how the potatoes will be labeled. The company said it's not selling Innate seed potatoes on the open market.

ConAgra, a major French fry and potato supplier through Lamb Weston to restaurant chains, said it won't use the potatoes.

"All Lamb Weston frozen potato products are made with non-GMO potatoes, in line with customer demand," a company statement said.



This May 10, 2013 file photo shows a genetically engineered potato poking through the soil of a planting pot inside J.R. Simplot's lab in southwestern Idaho. Potatoes that won't bruise and apples that won't brown are a step closer to grocery store aisles. The Food and Drug Administration on Friday, March 20, 2015, approved the genetically engineered foods as safe, saying they are as nutritious as their conventional counterparts. The approval covers six varieties of potatoes by Boise, Idaho-based J. R. Simplot Co. and two varieties of apples from the Canadian company Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc. (AP Photo/John Miller, File)

Food supplier McCain in a statement said its policy is to not use GMO potatoes. But the company also said it recognized the challenge of producing affordable food to meet demand and planned to monitor and possibly participate in research.

"Regulatory compliance and consumer acceptance for the use of any new technology will guide our actions," the company said.

Simplot says its potatoes will have 70 percent less acrylamide, a chemical that can be created when potatoes are cooked at high temperatures. And it's touting that as a health benefit, as some studies have shown acrylamide to be a potential carcinogen, though the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health says scientists "do not yet know with any certainty" whether the substance can be harmful in food.

The FDA in its approval Friday noted that acrylamide has been found to be a carcinogenic in rodents.



This May 10, 2013 file photo shows genetically engineered potatoes growing in rows inside a J.R. Simplot greenhouse in southwestern Idaho. Potatoes that won't bruise and apples that won't brown are a step closer to grocery store aisles. The Food and Drug Administration on Friday, March 20, 2015, approved the genetically engineered foods as safe, saying they are as nutritious as their conventional counterparts. The approval covers six varieties of potatoes by

Boise, Idaho-based J. R. Simplot Co. and two varieties of apples from the Canadian company Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc. (AP Photo/John Miller, File)

Simplot says its potatoes have 40 percent less bruising from impacts and pressure during harvest and storage than conventional potatoes, which the company said could reduce the more than 3 billion pounds of potatoes discarded yearly by consumers.

The FDA's review process is voluntary, but both companies asked for one. To review, FDA compares safety and data of the GMO food in comparison to conventional variety.

Gregory Jaffe, biotechnology director for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, in a statement Friday objected to the voluntary system for approving GMOs and said legislation is needed to make it mandatory.

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Citation: FDA approves genetically engineered potatoes, apples as safe (2015, March 20) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-gmo-potatoes-apples.html>

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