Canada gives nod to farm for genetically-modified salmon

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Natural Atlantic salmon typically reach maturity after 30 months while the GM version can be fully grown in just over half that time

Canada's first commercial farm for genetically-modified salmon received environmental approval on Tuesday—the final hurdle in a

decades-long push to bring the fast-growing fish to market, amid strong opposition.

US-based biotech firm AquaBounty said it would begin stocking its Rollo Bay facility in the eastern province of Prince Edward Island, capable of producing up to 250 metric tons (550,000 pounds) of fish a year, "as soon as possible."

The first commercial harvest, it said, is expected at the end of 2020, around the same time as another at the company's facility in Albany, Indiana.

The genetically-modified salmon has a gene that enables it to grow more rapidly than conventional salmon, and can reach adult size in 16 to 18 months, compared with 30 months for natural Atlantic salmon.

The company will be raising them in contained, land-based hatcheries.

The US and Canada found in 2015 and 2016, respectively, that the fish was safe to eat, clearing the way for it to become the first transgenic animal destined for North American dinner tables.

Environmentalists and consumer groups, however, continue to raise concerns that it could be dangerous to human health and may pose risks to wild fish if it were to escape into the environment.

"This decision means more Canadians will be eating GM salmon without knowing," said Lucy Sharratt of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, citing a lack of mandatory labeling of genetically-modified foods in Canada.

Argentina, Brazil and China have also granted environmental approvals for genetically-modified fish farming trials, the company said.