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## Government Responds to Genetically Modified Animals Report

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### Report Highlights:

The Canadian Government has responded to a report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food entitled, "Genetically Modified Animals for Human Consumption."

## **The Canadian Government Responds to Report on Genetically Modified Animals for Human Consumption**

The Canadian Government has responded to a report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food entitled, “Genetically Modified Animals for Human Consumption.” The following are extractions and summaries from the Committee’s report and the Government’s response.

Health Canada’s May 2016 approval of a GM salmon for sale as food has attracted attention on the use of genetic engineering in order to improve farm animals intended for human consumption. This was the first food in the world from a GM animal that could be sold on the market. It was also approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the United States in November 2015 and is currently going through the assessment process in Argentina and Brazil.

In a letter received on 20 May 2016, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food requested that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food (“the Committee”) examine the legal and regulatory framework around GM animals and their increasing availability for human consumption. On 1 June 2016, the Committee passed a motion to carry out a study on the full range of potential issues and challenges around approvals of products from genetically engineered animals with a requirement to report findings by December 2106.

After holding four hearings, the Committee made five recommendations. The Government responded in April by stating that it supports each of these recommendations. It then outlined how it is working to achieve them. Detailed below are the specific recommendations of the Committee and the Government’s response.

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee recommends that the government provide greater transparency in the regulatory system that evaluates genetically modified animals intended for human consumption.

The Government supports this recommendation and outlined how it provides information on the process to assess the safety of GM animals for human consumption through relevant departments and agencies (i.e., Health Canada, the CFIA, ECCC, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada).

For example, relevant departments and agencies publish plain language risk assessment summaries, scientific advice and resulting decisions (decision documents) on their respective websites. These documents summarize the thorough scientific assessments that underpin decisions to authorize GM animal products in Canada, as well as other GM products. For example, since 1994, the Government has published decision documents for more than 100 novel organisms (including GM organisms), approved for use as food, feed and/or for environmental release.

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee recommends that the government provide support for independent research into the health, environmental and other effects of new genetic modification technologies (including those to produce genetically modified animals).

The Government responded by saying that it supports this recommendation as it continues to provide support for independent research on GM technologies, which can include research into their health, environmental and other effects.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee recommends that the government support the mandatory labelling system only for issues of food health and safety.

The Government responded by saying that it supports the recommendation to require mandatory labelling of GM foods when health and safety concerns have been established. It then described its practice with regards to labelling.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee recommends that the government work with industry to establish tools to provide traceability for genetically modified animals.

In its response, the Government describes several existing tools, either in place or pending, for animal traceability to enable industry to meet domestic and export market requirements. These tools include animal registration for breeding purposes under the Animal Pedigree Act administered by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, livestock identification and movement requirements for cattle, bison, sheep, pigs and farmed wild boars under the Health of Animals Regulations, and the Safe Food for Canadian Regulations (pending), which would enable the CFIA to apply more consistent regulatory requirements and inspection approaches across all regulated food commodities.

The Government's response to each recommendation is available in its entirety at the following URL:  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=8884981&Language=e&Mode=1&Parl=42&Ses=1>

The Committee's report is available at the following URL:  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=e&Mode=1&Parl=42&Ses=1&DocId=8674228>

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