

Keeping it fresh

US approves biotech apple that resists browning

Carey Gillam

US regulators on Friday approved what would be the first commercialised biotech apple, rejecting efforts by the organic industry and other GMO critics to block the new fruit.

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) approved two genetically engineered apple varieties designed to resist browning that have been developed by the Canadian company Okanagan Specialty Fruits Inc.

Okanagan plans to market

the apples as Arctic Granny and Arctic Golden, and says the apples are identical to their conventional counterparts except the flesh of the fruit will retain a fresh appearance even after it is sliced or bruised. Okanagan President Neal Carter called the USDA approval "a monumental occasion."

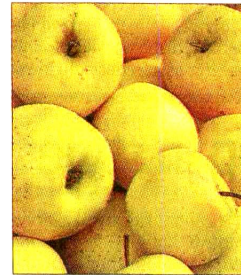
"It is the biggest milestone yet for us, and we can't wait until they're available for consumers," he said in a statement.

Carter said Arctic apples will first be available in late 2016 in small quantities, and it will take many years before

the apples are widely distributed.

The new Okanagan apples have drawn broad opposition. The Organic Consumers Association (OCA), which petitioned the USDA to deny approval, says the genetic changes that prevent browning could be harmful to human health, and pesticide levels on the apples could be excessive.

The OCA will be pressuring food companies and retail outlets not to make use of the apples, said OCA Director Ronnie Cummins. "This whole thing is just another big experiment on humans for no good



reason," he said.

USDA said it had determined the apples were "unlikely to pose a plant pest risk to agriculture" and they are "not likely to have a significant

impact on the human environment." The law only allows the agency's decision to be based on its analysis of the plant pest risk to agriculture or other plants in the United States.

The US Food and Drug Administration, which has no mandatory review process for genetically engineered foods, is looking at the new apples through a voluntary consultation with Okanagan.

Several science, environmental and consumer groups said they worry the genetic changes could have unintended consequences on insects, animals and humans.

Reuters