

Nation/Politics

Researchers bring home heart-healthy bacon

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- A microscopic worm may be the key to heart-friendly bacon.

Geneticists have mixed DNA from the roundworm *C. elegans* and from pigs to produce swine with significant amounts of omega-3 fatty acids -- the kind thought to stave off heart disease.

Researchers hope they can improve the technique in pork and do the same in chickens and cows. In the process, they also want to better understand human disease.

"We all can use more omega-3 in our diet," said Dr. Jing Kang, the Harvard Medical School researcher who discovered the omega-3-making gene in the worm.

Dr. Kang is one of 17 authors of the paper, which appeared yesterday in an online edition of the journal *Nature Biotechnology*.

The cloned, genetically engineered pigs are the latest advance in the agricultural biotechnology field, which is struggling to move beyond esoteric products such as bug-repelling corn and soy that is resistant to weed killers.

Hoping to create healthier, cheaper and tastier products that consumers crave, Monsanto Co. of St. Louis and its biotech farming competitors such as DuPont are developing omega-3-producing crops that yield healthier cooking oils. Dr. Kang said 30 academic laboratories are working with his omega-3 gene, presumably pursuing similar projects.

"Consumers have responded pretty positively when asked their opinion of food modified to improve food quality and food safety, just as long as the taste isn't altered negatively," said Christine Bruhn, director of the Center for Consumer Research at the University of California, Davis.

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