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Scientists Produce Heart-Healthy Pigs

Genetically engineered pork could eventually reach superma shelves

By Randy Dotinga
HealthDay Reporter

MONDAY, March 27 (HealthDay News) -- A team of scientists says it has genetically engineered pigs to produce healthier pork products, potentially giving consumers worldwide a new reason to bring home the bacon.

In a study released Sunday, the scientists said they'd managed to create pigs with higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which are normally found in fish and have long been linked to good health.

The pigs haven't ended up on anyone's plate yet, and no one knows how they Federal regulators will have to approve them before they reach the local superı Still, study co-author Dr. Jing X. Kang, an associate professor of medicine at H Medical School, said he has high hopes for these hogs.

"When you consume (the pork), you'll be able to get an omega-3 benefit simila when you eat fish," said Kang, who hopes to boost omega-3 levels in other ani food products, too.

Omega-3 fatty acids have a sterling reputation among nutritionists. "Some fats good for us, omega-3 being one of them. It's vital for health," said Lona Sando assistant professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at D and spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

Among other things, omega-3 fatty acids help our bodies process cholesterol, s blood vessels from clogging, and prevent inflammation, Sandon said. They alsc appear to help lower cholesterol levels.

While omega-3 is found in a number of foods, including some types of fish, flax soybean and canola oils, as well as some seeds and nuts, many people don't ea enough to get the added health benefits, Sandon said.

Enter the genetically engineered pigs. In a report published in the March 26 on issue of *Nature Biotechnology*, Kang and colleagues reported they've successfu

cloned pigs with higher omega-3 levels.

Researchers haven't yet tasted pork from the pigs, he said, because some were slaughtered to undergo chemical analysis, while others are being kept alive for breeding purposes. But it may be possible for people to taste the meat from th within the next year, he said.

If federal regulators ultimately approve the sale of this genetically engineered might cost a bit more than the regular variety, Kang said. But production costs shouldn't be that different, potentially keeping the price gap small, he said.

Sandon said it's too early to know whether healthier pork will affect heart disea rates. However, pork can already be part of a healthy diet, she said, especially consumers choose lean pork chops over ribs, bacon or sausage.

"Healthiness comes down to the choice of cut of the meat and the quantity," sh "It all comes back to making smart choices and moderation."

For now, Kang and colleagues will continue their federally funded research into genetically engineered pigs. "We have to do a lot of tests and studies required [U.S. Food and Drug Administration]," he said.

The researchers are also looking at boosting omega-3 levels in chicken and cov along with some types of fish that naturally have low levels of the fatty acids.

More information

Learn more about omega-3 fatty acids from the **American Heart Association**

SOURCES: Jing X. Kang, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor, medicine, Harvard M School, Boston; Lona Sandon, MEd, R.D., L.D., assistant professor, University Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, and spokeswoman, American Diete Association; March 26, 2006, *Nature Biotechnology* online

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