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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: The CAP's role on safeguarding high-quality and primary farm-based food production
- Information from the Austrian, French and Italian delegations, supported by the Czech, Cypriot, Greek, Hungarian, Luxembourg, Maltese, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Spanish delegations

With a view to an 'Any other business' item at the Council ('Agriculture and Fisheries') on 23 January 2024, delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Austrian, French and Italian delegations, supported by the Czech, Cypriot, Greek, Hungarian, Luxembourg, Maltese, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Spanish delegations, on the above-mentioned subject.

CAP's role in safeguarding high-quality and primary farm-based food production

Note from the Austrian, French and Italian delegations

supported by the Czech, Cypriot, Greek, Hungarian, Luxembourg, Maltese, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Spanish delegations

European farmers contribute to some 1.3% of European GDP, yet their efforts in ensuring food security and increased self-sufficiency as well as providing citizens with high quality and safe food is much more elevated. European farmers are certainly the backbone of the rural economy as well as prosperous and vital rural areas, by cultivating them with sustainable practices encouraged by the CAP and protecting cultural landscapes and the environment. European agriculture does also stand out for its farm-based and primary production approach. All of this is guaranteed by the CAP.

Parallely, some new lab-grown artificial cell-based food¹ production practices have been surfacing across the globe. However, these practices represent a threat to primary farm-based approaches and genuine food production methods that are at the very heart of the European farming model. These new practices include the production of meat using stem cell technology, which requires tissue from living animals.

The development of this new laboratory cultivated food production raises many questions that have to be thoroughly discussed between the Member States, the Commission, stakeholders and the general public. A number of questions are already partially covered or taken into account by the provisions of Regulation (EU) No 2015/2283 on *Novel Foods* (such as safety risks to human health or certain labelling requirements to avoid consumers to be misled). **These questions are essential for the future society that we want to build in Europe and should therefore be part of a renewed and broad debate in the EU specific to lab-grown meat.**

¹ According to FAO-WHO definition: "Food safety aspects of cell-based food" - <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240070943>

They are inter alia as broad as follows:

- **Ethical questions:** While the EU has decided to ban hormone-treated meat or food produced from cloned animals, would we be ready to allow laboratory-cultivated meat? Can cell-based meat production be considered as a more animal friendly alternative to animal husbandry, if it does involve the killing of animals?
- **Economic questions:** How are we to guarantee the viability of livestock farming and of rural areas? How are we to prevent the creation of monopolies or oligopolies on the food market? How are we to prevent the apparition of new dependencies while reaffirming that it is essential to guarantee our strategic autonomy in the food sector?
- **Sustainability issues:** How are we to maintain grasslands and extensive farming practices including in less favoured and mountain areas, which provide invaluable environmental services such as carbon storage, without livestock? What is the real carbon footprint of these lab-grown meat production techniques?
- **Social questions:** How do we ensure that inequalities do not increase as regards the affordability of genuine meat-based products between consumers?
- **Public health concerns:** How are we to guarantee the safety of the stem cell technology to avoid health risks for consumers?
- **Transparency issues:** How are we to guarantee that consumers are fully aware of the production methods, including if the product originates from a third country?
- **Legal aspects:** Does the current regulation on *Novel Foods* provide a suitable and comprehensive frame to assess the potential risks associated with these products while taking fully into account the precautionary principle?

In that context, we ask for a broader approach on cell-based meat production in order to **take into account these questions and outcomes of the discussions to be held with the Member States and European civil society before taking any market authorisation decisions.** We recall that the EU has never delivered any authorisation on animal products based on cell cultivation techniques so far. **Hence, a transparent, science-based and comprehensive approach is necessary to assess the development of artificial cell-based meat production, which in our view does not constitute a sustainable alternative to primary farm-based production.**

Pending the question on the current regulation as suitable legal framework, the outcome of this renewed and broad debate should be based on several elements starting with dedicated EFSA guidelines, which should notably cover certain aspects of evaluation currently provided for new pharmaceutical products, including pre-clinical and clinical studies that will be used as safety criteria for an opinion of EFSA. A comprehensive impact assessment of the Commission taking all the issues at stake into account, including EU consumers and citizens' views, should also be conducted. It is only after all these steps that the Council will be able to hold a political orientation debate on the future of cell-based meat products in the EU.

Fact based information: no green washing

Currently, there is no authorisation to offer cell-based meat on the EU-market, as such novel foods require an assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) with regard to possible health risks prior to market authorisation. Moreover, lab-grown meat does neither pose a more environmentally friendly alternative to meat produced from farm animals, nor does it provide for higher animal welfare standards. Initial studies² also show a poor climate balance of lab-grown meat and indicate a very energy-intensive process, generating up to 25 times more CO₂ equivalents per kilogram of meat produced compared to genuine meat.³ **We call on the Commission to ensure accurate and independent science-based information sharing and counter any deceiving greenwashing-campaigns. If this information shows that lab-grown meat provides no clear benefits such as for the environment, consumers' health, rural areas and farmers, we will not be in a position to take into consideration the development of this new sector in the EU.**

²University of Oxford: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2019.00005/full>

³University of California in Davis: <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2023.04.21.537778v1>

More transparency

According to a Euro-Barometer Survey from 2020⁴, the three most important aspects to consumers are healthy whole foods (74 %), regional production (50 %) and foods, that were produced with minimal waste (40 %) as well as animal welfare (16%). However, the survey also showed that the three greatest barriers to sustainable choices were affordability (49%), availability (45%) and the lack of clear information labelling (41%). There is a growing demand for transparency on the origin of ingredients and on production methods amongst consumers. Thus, if these new products were to be authorised in the EU market in the future, it would be necessary to ensure that EU consumers are in a position to make a free and informed choice through mandatory labelling of these products, wherever they come from. **Prior to any authorisation we call on the Commission to launch, a genuine and comprehensive public consultation on lab grown meat. Besides, based on what is also laid down in the EU regulations on the definition of meat products, cell-based products can never be called meat. We thus call on the Commission to ensure that artificially lab-grown products must never be promoted as or confused for authentic foods.**

Impact Assessment on EU strategic autonomy and food sovereignty

Lab-grown cell-based meat production requires economies of scale to operate cost effectively. Given the high fixed costs, there are high risks that artificial meat production would consequently be monopolized amongst a few large-scale industrial producers. This could lead to crisis-prone dependencies along the value chain and create additional pressure on small-scaled family owned farms. **We urge the Commission and all Member States to take pre-emptive action against the monopolization of food production and towards the diversification of primary farm-based food production guaranteed by European farmers. Additionally we call on the Commission to present a fact-based and comprehensive impact assessment on artificial meat prior to any authorisation for sale and consumption. This impact assessment shall address ethical, economic, social and environmental questions, as well as, nutrition, health safety, food sovereignty and animal welfare concerns.**

⁴https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-11/f2f_conf_20201016_pres-01.pdf