

Cultured Meat in the EU Market: Caution, not Preconceived Barriers

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Laboratory-grown meat, also known as cultured meat, cell-based meat or artificial meat, is an alternative to conventional meat. It is grown in the laboratory through a process that involves taking a biopsy from a live animal and separating the stem cells from the muscle cells. These stem cells are grown in an environment that provides them with the nutrients they need to multiply, including sugar, salt and serum, usually taken from dead calf fetuses, to multiply and turn into muscle and fat cells, eventually forming pieces of meat.

- ▶ At Cultured meat shows promise in addressing environmental concerns yet faces hurdles such as high production costs and uncertain consumer acceptance.
- ▶ The conflict between Italy's ban on cultured meat and EU directives raises regulatory uncertainties, emphasizing the need for harmonized approaches within the European market.
- ▶ The debate over cultured meat extends beyond legal considerations to ethical and commercial dimensions, highlighting the importance of nuanced discussions and balanced regulatory frameworks.

Cultured Meat: Pros and Cons

At present, scientific research suggests that there are several advantages and disadvantages to the widespread use of cultured meat. The main benefits would be environmental and food sustainability, namely:

- Cultured meat's popularity could lower animal slaughter, cutting greenhouse gases from farming.
- Less land and water use if we raise fewer animals and need less feed.
- More accessible animal protein can sustainably feed a growing population of 9 billion by 2050.

Negative aspects and potential risks of cultured meat include:

- The overall environmental benefits of cultured meat remain uncertain, given its early-stage production systems and high energy requirements. If reliant on non-renewable sources, this could exacerbate greenhouse gas emissions.
- Production costs are prohibitive, mainly due to pricey ingredients like animal serum necessary for cell growth. While synthetic alternatives exist, animal stem cells currently offer higher efficiency.
- Taste preferences vary; while some find cultured meat comparable to traditional meat, consumer acceptance requires further testing before market viability.
- Labelling and advertising standards are yet to be established; while technically considered meat, clear differentiation from traditional meat is essential.
- Its health benefits and nutritional value compared to traditional meat remain unknown at this stage.

On a commercial level, it is estimated that the market for meat substitutes could reach \$ 140 billion by 2030, but this does not mean that consumers are ready to consider cultured meat in the same way as existing meat substitutes. As mentioned above, production costs are currently extremely high (the first cultured meat burger, created in 2013, cost around \$ 140,000): this means that radical improvements that reduce production costs will be required for mass commercialisation. Moreover, the fact that it still requires an animal cell and serum base does not make it suitable for vegetarians and vegans.

Potential Future Marketing of Cultured Meat in the EU: Italian Barriers against European Treaties?

- Italian Regulation of Cultured Meat

By passing a law banning the production and marketing of so-called cultured meat, Italy has raised the question of the future place of this product on the European market. The draft law, which was approved by the Italian Parliament on 1 December, penalises trade in food and feed produced from cell cultures or tissues derived from vertebrate animals with fines of between € 10,000 and € 60,000 or up to 10% of the annual turnover of the last financial year before the offence was detected, up to a maximum of € 150,000.

- EU Directive Compliance

As it provides, inter alia, for a ban on the marketing of certain products, the Italian law on cultured meat should have been notified to the European Commission prior to its formal adoption by the Italian Parliament, in accordance with Directive (EU) 2015/1535, which governs the so-called TRIS (Technical

Regulation Information System) procedure, as is required for all draft technical regulations prohibiting the manufacture, import, marketing or use of industrially manufactured products, agricultural products and fishery products.

The notification to the Commission triggers a three-month standstill period during which the Commission and the other Member States examine the notified draft technical regulation, which cannot be adopted by the notifying Member State, for compatibility with EU law and the principles of free movement of goods and services. During the standstill period, the Commission and the other Member States may issue comments or detailed opinions, while only the Commission may block a draft technical regulation. If comments are made, the standstill period is not extended, so that at the end of the three-month period the Member State concerned may adopt the notified measure without being obliged to respond to the comments received. However, as far as possible, it considers the comments made by the Commission and the Member States during the parliamentary scrutiny of the regulation.

- Challenges and Next Steps

However, instead of simply notifying the text of the law and waiting for the reactions of the Commission and the Member States, the Government initially notified the existence of the draft law on farmed meat, but then withdrew it from the Tris procedure before the Italian Parliament had adopted it. The Commission therefore had to limit itself to informing Italy that the Tris procedure had been closed prematurely without a Commission decision because the text of the Italian law had been "adopted by the Member State before the end of the three-month period". The Commission then invited Italy to inform it of the outcome of the draft law on cultured meat, including in the light of the relevant case law of the Court of Justice, and stated that it would not make any further comments at this stage.

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