

A ban on cultivated meat is a ban on European research and innovation

7th October 2024

In July this year, Hungary notified the European Commission of a national draft law banning the production and sale of cultivated meat, on grounds that “technologies other than traditional food production” threaten “our fundamental values and fundamental rights to physical and mental health and a healthy environment”.¹

We, European startup organizations, strongly oppose this draft law, as it would be a major setback not only for the European food tech industry but for innovation in Europe at large. More specifically, we oppose the draft law for 5 reasons:

1. **A ban on cultivated meat would set a dangerous precedent for European technologies.** While cultivated meat is already available for consumers in other global markets, it has not yet reached European supermarket shelves². Cultivated meat has significant potential in reducing the environmental impact of livestock farming without disrupting European food culture. Banning a novel food like cultivated meat even before it has been assessed by the European Food Safety Authority sends a worrying message to citizens, the academic community and the market: technological development can be halted in Europe on ideological, rather than scientific grounds. Indeed, we expect this ban to have a ripple effect on the development, investment in, and take up of other biotechnologies, particularly in modern food biomanufacturing where there is huge potential for decarbonising our food system.
2. **Biotechnologies like the ones behind cultivated meat are strategic for Europe’s sovereignty, food security and global competitiveness.** The European Union is currently home to some of the most innovative companies in biotechnology. Cultivated meat companies rely on decades of European research in cell culture, stem cell biology, tissue engineering, fermentation, chemical and bioprocess engineering. The very technology behind cultivated meat was developed in the EU. Moreover, the importance of biotechnology in reducing Europe’s dependencies has been acknowledged in the recently adopted Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP). If a ban on cultivated meat is enforced, a promising part of this nascent industry may disappear, while Europe’s leading competitors -the US and China- are heavily investing in food bio-manufacturing³.

¹ <https://technical-regulation-information-system.ec.europa.eu/en/notification/26066>

² Ford, A. (2024). EU’s first application for cultivated meat is for French foie gras. POLITICO

³ Anstey, C. (2024). Cutting China Out of Biotech Unifies Democrats, Republicans. Bloomberg

3. **The draft law is incompatible with the Single Market both in principle and law.** Approving the commercialization of foodstuff in the Single Market is a prerogative of the EU as it involves free trade within the block. National bans in Member States therefore impose artificial trade barriers within the Single Market and alter the level-playing field for European companies.
4. **A ban is not needed to protect Europeans' health.** The regulation (EU) 2015/2283 on Novel Foods already provides a comprehensive legal framework to ensure the safety of all novel foods, including cultivated meat. This regulation requires that novel foods undergo comprehensive evidence-based safety assessments by the European Food Safety Authority to determine if they are fit for human consumption. Only once these products have been deemed safe for human consumption they are permitted on the EU market. We believe the existing regulatory framework is sufficient to ensure food safety.
5. **Consumers should have freedom of choice.** If approved by the European Food Safety Authority, cultivated meat will be just one among many traditional meat alternatives already available on the market. As has been the case for other alternatives, it should remain up to consumers to decide whether to consume traditional or alternative food.

On these grounds, **we call on the European Commission to refuse the Hungarian draft law.**

Signatories

Dutch Startup Association
France DeepTech
France Digitale
German Startup Association (Startup Verband)
Italian Tech Alliance
Start Industrie
Startup Hungary Foundation