Lab-grown proteins are a direct threat to food sovereignty, i.e. the right of all citizens to define their own agricultural and food system.

Therefore, we have to urgently speak out against this phenomenon that is creeping onto our plates in Europe, especially because there is a lack of democratic debate around the topic. Instead, European public funding[1] is being used to promote this product; the so-called "meat, fish, milk, cheese, pâté" (alternative) foods do not come from animals yet threaten the existence of livestock farming, a necessary part of our food sovereignty. Given that these foods will be on the market in Europe by the end of 2022, ECVC wants thorough research to be done on their economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts. How will the EU apply the precautionary principle? What regulatory legislation will be implemented?

ECVC sees lab-grown proteins for what they really are: a danger!
The global meat market giants claim to have good intentions. Laboratory proteins are not yet on our plates, but they are already being pitched as the miracle solution to many of society’s problems by rich and powerful lobbies. These are dominated by the traditional industrial meat players: Cargill, JBS, Tyson foods, as well as newcomers: Aleph farms, Mosa meat, Beyond meat, WH Group[2].

Intensive industrial meat production is increasingly being questioned - and rightly so! As a result, these giants are protecting their financial and economic interests by investing in this new market. If we look at the 2030 horizon of this market, as proposed by these actors, we see an extreme concentration of food production in the hands of multinational industries[3]. In these scenarios, a future without farms or farmers in different territories is foreseen. Nature would be “protected”, instead of used respectfully. However, this vision of isolating nature separates humans and the environment, which is not a viable or desirable reality. Farmers maintain the countryside by cultivating biodiversity and landscapes, but also make rural areas socially and economically dynamic. Beyond the impacts on human interaction with the territories, this monopoly on producing ultra-processed products immediately raises questions about food sovereignty. There is a real risk to food supply and access if production is concentrated in the hands of a few companies. These financially powerful companies are also far from the local territories, from the people, and particularly privileged by the system. Their priorities are not ensuring access or quality of food, as Cargill, Jbs, Tyson and others have demonstrated so far.

In addition to this, there are some often-heard but dangerously simplistic claims.
They say that: “Lab proteins will solve the climate crisis because it can replace industrial meat production.”

What is the problem? This allegation needs to be qualified, as the calculations used to make the claim generally cannot capture the range of interactions between complex socio-ecological systems involved in livestock farming and fishing. There is an urgent need to reduce the impact of agriculture on the climate, and especially that of intensive industrial agriculture, but it is an entire system that must change. Since the 1950s, farmers have been pushed to industrialise and get bigger in order to get access to subsidies. Undoing this means organising a real transition for them. There are other farming methods, such as peasant farming, which are essential to agroecology and which respect living organisms and biological life cycles, but also the economy and society. There are studies that take a holistic approach to this issue, such as the one carried out by Lynch and Pierrehumbert, from the University of Oxford, which underlines that the impact on global warming of non-intensively produced meat inspired by agroecology is lower than that of meat produced in laboratories over the long term.[4] It assumes that farmed meat mainly emits methane, while laboratory meat mainly produces carbon dioxide (CO2).

While methane has a higher warming power than CO2, the latter remains in the atmosphere up to 10 times longer. But to tell the truth, aside from these calculations, there is so much more to gain from ensuring a real agroecological transition for farmers takes place[5]. The realities of livestock farming cannot be reduced to its carbon emissions. It provides work, helps to bring the countryside to life and cultivate rich biodiversity, and contributes to the local economy and practices. Peasant agroecology is the basis of a resilient system, in which livestock farming is the foundation of food sovereignty, ensuring the biological fertility of our soils and without depending on petrochemicals (fertilisers, pesticides etc.) that harm our environment. Farmers, through their daily work, are the guardians of the relationship between humans and nature.
What is the problem? - Laboratory protein producers claim that cholesterol in the product could be controlled, that fewer antibiotics would be used and there would be less chance of animal diseases spreading. Once again, our solution to these issues would be to focus on an agroecological transition, because the lab-protein proposal is simply the lesser of two evils: we would stop dumping poor quality meat on the markets, but be left dependant on an unproven, insufficiently tested product. Indeed, no study or analysis explains how human metabolism will be affected in the long term. Roy et al, researchers at Quest International University in Malaysia, cite the high risk of dysregulation of cell lines, mimicking the effects of cancer, if laboratory protein production becomes massive[6]. By standardising food production, the whole system, unified as it would be, become vulnerable to the same external diseases or disturbances[7] - just think about the current spread of different epidemics in intensive industrial animal husbandry. Finally, the manufacture of laboratory proteins requires hormones that are banned in European livestock farms by the European Union[8].
LIE #3

They say that: lab-grown proteins will help us meet the increased global food demand.

What’s the problem? To meet society's food needs, it is not really a question of trying to produce more food but rather of distributing it better.

One third of the food produced is wasted and 800 million people suffer from undernutrition[9], so the challenge is making healthy, quality food accessible to the entire population. Moreover, although people may not have access to meat, that often doesn't necessarily they don't have access to sufficient "protein" components in their diet. Although difficulties in accessing protein can be noted in certain parts of the world, the idea of a global protein deficit is hardly justified by the data.[10] Instead, nutritional deficiencies are generally related to diet, poor absorption of nutrients, and lack of clean water and sanitation, among other factors.[11] Again, a holistic approach is needed.

As explained above, the development of laboratory proteins suggests that our food sovereignty will be held prisoner, at the mercy of the decisions of a few. We prefer to move towards food sovereignty and strengthen local production and local markets. We prefer to demand fair wages for farmers, based on the purchase of their products at reasonable prices and not on market fluctuations and dumping. We encourage the EU to focus more on the control of food at local level, adapted to local territories, to recognise the value of local products that are produced with dignity, increasing knowledge, capacity and know-how and working with and in nature.
We ask EU Institutions to apply the precautionary principle as mentioned in Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which is a fundamental right of the EU on which European food and environmental law is based. We call on the EU institutions to ban this new product.

We demand agricultural policies that guarantee fair prices for farmers and that propose a real transition towards agroecology. This means supporting farmers in this direction, ending free trade agreements for agriculture and regulating prices at the European market level.

We reject intensive industrial farming and want animals to be reared with dignity and respect. After years of public policies encouraging practices of degradation, we must now allow farmers to leave destructive agriculture behind.

SO, WHAT IS THE EU WAITING FOR? WE HAVE TO STOP FOOD PRODUCTION BEING TAKEN OVER BY A HANDFUL OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES.

Here are our three demands:
REFERENCES


[3] Read the Rethinkx report on agriculture and food, to which several of these actors contributed, including the Good Food Institute lobby organisation: https://www.rethinkx.com/food-and-agriculture


[5] The TYFA Scenario explains how an agroecological transition would allow Europe to face its climate challenges while being able to feed itself: https://www.iddri.org/fr/projet/reussir-la-transition-agro-ecologique-en-europe


