Explaining the EU regulatory framework for cultivated meat

With authorisation applications for cultivated meat potentially on the horizon in the EU, interest among policymakers and the public has been sparked by this emerging food production method. This note provides information on the EU's Novel Food framework for the authorisation of cultivated meat products.

What is cultivated meat?

Cultivated meat aims to deliver chicken, pork, beef and seafood that is indistinguishable from the meat we eat today. It involves taking a small animal cell sample and growing it in a fermentor that supports the same process that happens inside an animal, providing warmth and basic nutrients. The result is animal fat or ground meat, which can be mixed with plant-based ingredients to make final products that are indistinguishable from conventionally produced meat.



Image: New Age Meats

How is cultivated meat regulated in the EU?

Before a cultivated meat product can be sold in the European Union, it must be approved by the European Commission and EU member states. Pre-market authorisation is governed by the EU Novel Foods Regulation, one of the world's most rigorous food safety frameworks. The process involves a comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of the safety and nutritional value of each cultivated meat product. The novel food authorisation process consists of two stages: risk assessment and risk management. During the risk assessment phase, the European Commission asks the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to evaluate the nutritional, toxicological, and allergenic properties of the novel food, as well as its production process. EFSA has nine months to provide the European Commission with a scientific opinion on the product's safety, which is often extended when it asks the applicant for additional information. If EFSA's opinion is positive, the process moves to risk management, where the European Commission has seven months to draft an implementing act. This act is reviewed by the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF Committee), which includes representatives from the Commission and all 27 EU member states. After the approval of the implementing act, the product is added to the Union List of novel foods, and can then be sold in all 27 member states.

Is the Novel Food authorisation process robust enough?

Yes. As the European Commission notes, the EU has some of the highest food safety standards in the world. Food safety is guaranteed through regulatory measures across the entire food chain and the Novel Food Regulation is an integral part of this, providing a thorough and evidence-based evaluation process. EFSA has consistently been found to deliver high-quality scientific advice, and retains a high level of trust amongst stakeholders and the public, and EFSA itself has stated that the Novel Food Regulation and associated guidance are fit for purpose in the context of cultivated meat.

Do member states have a role in authorisations?



Foto: Mosa Meat

Yes. During the risk management stage of novel food approvals, the European Commission, along with the 27 representatives of each EU member state, are brought together via the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF). PAFF Committee decision-making is via qualified majority voting, providing member states substantial input into authorisation decisions.

Can the regulatory framework also consider social and economic impacts of products?

Yes. The Novel Food authorisation process can take wider considerations beyond food safety into account. As the General Food Law states, during risk management, the Commission and representatives of all 27 EU member states can consider “other legitimate factors” alongside the scientific risk assessment, such as societal, economic, traditional, ethical and environmental factors, enabling product authorisation decisions to be taken in a holistic context.

Does the public have a voice in the authorisation process?

Yes. The Novel Foods Regulation also includes a public consultation stage. During the risk assessment process, citizens, researchers, and stakeholders can provide feedback through OpenEFSA. The consultation invites comments on scientific data and studies that may be relevant to EFSA's evaluation of the product.

Should we regulate cultivated meat as a pharmaceutical product?

No. Cultivated meat is a food product manufactured in food production facilities and is therefore regulated as food, under the same safety and hygiene standards that apply to all foods consumed in Europe. The Novel Foods Regulation (Article 3) explicitly covers food produced from animal cell or tissue culture. There is no precedent in Europe for regulating food products under pharmaceutical legislation. Doing so would undermine regulators' ability to address issues

specifically related to food safety. Foods and medicines are subject to different regulatory systems because they serve fundamentally different purposes. In fact, food regulation is, in some respects, more stringent: medicines may be authorised despite known side effects if their benefits outweigh the risks, whereas the European Commission can approve foods only when EFSA has concluded that there is no evidence of risk to human health under the intended conditions of use.

Does the EU precautionary principle mean cultivated meat market entry should be stopped even if EFSA confirmed the product is safe?

No. Under the EU General Food Law, the precautionary principle can be considered during the risk management stage if EFSA's risk assessment concludes that a health risk is possible but cannot be quantified or properly characterised, as more information is needed and scientific uncertainty persists.

Any measures adopted under the precautionary principle must be proportionate, necessary to protect human health, and temporary pending further scientific investigation. The Commission highlights that the "precautionary principle can under no circumstances be used to justify the adoption of arbitrary decisions". Cultivated meat can only be consumed in the EU once EFSA has confirmed it is safe and the European Commission and member states have decided to authorise its sale.

How should cultivated meat be labelled?

Labelling and denominations for cultivated meat will be addressed during the Novel Food authorisation process. In March 2026, the EU decided to restrict the use of 32 traditional terms, including 'meat', for plant-based and cultivated meat products. For cultivated meat and ingredients, this restriction poses an allergy risk for consumers who need to clearly understand what they are purchasing. Research shows that using descriptive 'meaty' names for cultivated products is essential for consumer understanding. During risk management, the Commission and member states should ensure the approach remains consumer-driven, as these restrictions risk significantly undermining the stated objective that labelling "shall not mislead consumers".

Are there ways in which the regulatory framework for cultivated meat could be improved?

EU food safety regulations are some of the world's most robust, and these standards must be upheld for cultivated meat. While the regulatory framework is fit for purpose for assessing cultivated meat, there are opportunities to make the authorisation process more transparent and efficient. This includes better guidance, more pre-submission support for producers, and supervised frameworks, such as regulatory sandboxes, to build a better understanding of these new products.

About the Good Food Institute Europe

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We champion the science, policies and investment needed to make alternative proteins delicious, affordable and accessible across Europe.

By advancing plant-based foods, cultivating meat from cells and producing ingredients through fermentation, we can boost food security, meet our climate targets and support nature-friendly farming. GFI Europe is powered by philanthropy. Find out more