

# Bans on Manufacture, Sale, and Distribution of Cultivated Meat

**T**wo states, Florida and Alabama, recently banned the production, sale, and distribution of cultivated meat, setting up a potential roadblock on the path to commercialization of a technology heralded as an environmentally sound solution to feeding an ever-growing world population.

The new bans are not the first state law restrictions on cultivated meat. According to the Congressional Research Service, in 2018 states started enacting cultivated meat labeling laws that take a variety of approaches, such as prohibiting the use of the word “meat” on cultivated products. Over a dozen states have enacted such laws.

Some states also are considering bans on cultivated meat sales. Harvard’s Sparsha Saha told the *Washington Post*: “If other states copy Florida and Alabama, it could be disastrous for the public interest in the long run. Imagine a ban on renewable energy—that’s the comparison.”

The state bans follow the Food and

Drug Administration’s 2022 premarket approval of the sale of cultivated chicken by GOOD Meat and UPSIDE Foods. And, in 2023, the Department of Agriculture, which shares oversight responsibilities with FDA, issued grants of inspection to the companies’ facilities and approved the label of “cell-cultivated chicken” for their products.

In a nutshell, cultivated meat is made by placing a small biopsy of cells (usually muscle tissue stem cells) from a living animal in a liquid medium that contains nutrients and growth factors. The cells are placed in a bioreactor (such as a large stainless-steel tank) that provide a controlled, constant environment. The cells proliferate, differentiate, and eventually mature into muscle fibers that can be harvested.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis

explained the ban is intended “to stop the World Economic Forum’s goal of forcing the world to eat lab-grown meat and insects.” He underscored that “Florida is increasing meat production . . . and encouraging residents to continue to consume and enjoy 100 percent real Florida beef.” He further emphasized: “Florida is fighting back against the global elite’s plan.”

In fact, WEF did not recommend “forcing” people to eat alternative proteins but rather observed that “insect farming for food and animal feed could offer an environmentally friendly solution to the impending food crisis.” The organization also noted that “currently, 1-1.2 trillion insects are raised on farms annually for food and animal feed.” Similarly, WEF suggested that in “the face of climate change, resource scarcity, and a rising human population, cellular

agriculture is well suited to help diversify production of animal proteins and fats.”

The legislative director for the Good Food Institute, or GFI, a nonprofit that

advances alternative proteins, criticized the “shortsighted” bans as “trampling on consumer choice and criminalizing agricultural innovation.” He noted that the bans “stand in stark contrast to many other states actively creating economic opportunities through investments in alternative proteins for their 21st century economies.”

And meat industry support for state bans is not monolithic. For example, according to the National Chicken Council’s Mike Brown: “We support consumer choice, and we can meet any competing protein on a level playing field.”

To date, cultivated meat products are only sold in two restaurants—in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. The Congressional Research Service cites “various hurdles in commercial-



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izing the technology,” such as “scaling up production, matching the taste and texture of traditional meat, and reducing the cost of finished products.” GFI acknowledges these challenges, observing that cultivated meat is “doing what young industries do—learning, testing, fixing, solving.” However, it will take years to achieve a large and mature national market for synthetic meat.

In addition, studies that project greenhouse gas emissions associated with producing cultivated meats have reached widely differing conclusions, depending on the assumptions used about future production methods and energy sources. Furthermore, meat industry representatives and politicians have raised concerns about the potential health effects of cultivated meat, pointing to a lack of long-term studies. But so far, cultivated meat appears to have the upper hand in regard to its conventional counterpart.

Despite these challenges, GFI cites an impressive level of market activity and capital investment, counting 174 dedicated cultivated meat companies and over 80 additional companies involved in the industry. In addition, GFI reports over \$3 billion in total invested capital since 2013. Notably, large food companies, including Tyson, Cargill, Nestlé, and Danone, are engaging with the cultivated meat industry through investments, research, and other means.

Regardless of any additional state bans, the cultivated meat sector appears likely to continue to develop.

**Bans “stand in stark contrast” to states that want to grow their economies**