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The future of artificial meat from cultured cells is uncertain

The production of in vitro meat regularly generates media interest because of its potential contribution to feed the growing human population while also protecting the environment and respecting animal life. Proponents of artificial meat have developed a communication strategy which is convincing for young and urban consumers, who do not know animal husbandry, are eager for exciting technologies or who do not know very well the subject. The media also have an important responsibility in advertising artificial meat. However, many experts consider that there are still numerous technological obstacles that needs to be overcome to produce in vitro meat: new formulation of culture media, development of giant incubators, safety assessment for human consumption, etc. It is not sure that artificial meat will soon be on the market due to its high production cost and the need for further research before its commercialization. In addition, even if in vitro meat could eliminate the supposed lack of wellbeing of livestock and has the potential to free up cultivable land, other supposed advantages (such as its lower carbon footprint compared to conventional meat) are questionable and not always agreed upon by the scientific community. In addition, a major problem for the commercialization of in vitro meat would be its acceptance by consumers, although some consumers are ready to taste it at least once. Indeed, the artificial nature of the product goes against the growing demand for natural products in many countries. The consumption of in vitro meat will depend on a conflict of values at an individual or collective level. In fact, a range of other complementary solutions already exist which meet the challenges of food supply in our society and which are certainly faster to develop in the short term, but which are less saleable to the media.

Biography

Jean Francois Hocquette has been a Scientist at INRA (the French National Institute of Agricultural Research) since 1991. His research interest mainly concerns muscle biology as relevant to muscle growth and beef eating quality. His scientific activity resulted in 252 papers, 2 patents, over $5M in grants, mentorship (27 scholars), adjunct ship (800 students) and 60 lectures worldwide. In 2014 and 2016, he organized the French Meat R&D Congress (150 to 240 attendees). He was involved in EU-programs on meat. He was Head of the Herbivore Research Unit (172 staff) and now works for the High Council for Evaluation of Research & Higher Education. He is involved in the activities of the EAAP (European Association for Animal Production) and of the French Meat Academy. He was an Associate Editor of BMC Genomics, edited two EAAP books (#112 & #133) and is currently Editor-in-Chief of the French Meat R&D Journal (5600 subscribers).

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