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DRAFT REPORT

European Protein Strategy
(2023/2015(INI))

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

European Protein Strategy
(2023/2015(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to its resolution of 17 April 2018 on a European strategy for the promotion of protein crops – encouraging the production of protein and leguminous plants in the European agriculture sector (2017/2116(INI))[1],

– having regard to its resolution on 24 March 2022 on the need for an urgent EU action plan to ensure food security inside and outside the EU in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022/2593(RSP))[2],

– having regard to its resolution of 20 October 2021 on a Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system (2020/2260(INI))[3],

– having regard to the Council conclusions of 16 March 2022 on Enhancing the potential of plant-based proteins in Europe in line with the objectives set out in the European Green Deal submitted by Austria and subsequently signed by 19 other Member States,

– having regard to the Commission Report on the development of plant proteins in the European Union (COM(2018)0757 final),

– having regard to the Commission staff working document Drivers of food security (SWD(2023) 4 final),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 on a Farm to Fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system (COM(2020)0381),

– having regard to the Agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015 (the Paris Agreement),

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 (European Climate Law),

– having regard to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

– having regard to UN World Population Prospects 2022,

[1] OJ C 390, 18.11.2019, p. 2
[2] P9_TA(2022)0099
[3] OJ C 184, 5.5.2022, p. 2

– having regard to the OECD FAO Agricultural Outlook 2021-2030,

– having regard to the STOA Study on ‘Got Protein?’ Alternative protein sources in sustainable animal and human nutrition: Potentials and prospects’,

– having regard to the Versailles declaration, 10 and 11 March 2022,

– having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A9-0000/2023),

A. whereas proteins are essential for both human and animals and hence are indispensable components in food and feed;

B. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have had dramatic effects on global trade and have made it more apparent that the EU needs to diversify its food supply chains;

C. whereas the EU production of protein used for feed in the EU is 77 %; whereas only 29 % of the high protein feed needed to balance feed originates from the EU;

D. whereas plant-based proteins are crucial for the transition towards more sustainable food systems and reduced climate impact;

E. whereas the use of leguminous crops and grasslands maintain and improve soil quality, increase biodiversity as well as carbon and nitrogen fixation;

F. whereas the processing of protein crops and grasslands generates by-products which can contribute to a circular economy;

G. whereas the market for plant-based protein and alternative protein food is steadily increasing due to consumer demand;

H. whereas aquaculture has a crucial role in global food security and nutrition;

I. whereas cell-based agriculture and seafood are promising and innovative solutions;

J. whereas the interest of insects for human and animal consumption is growing;

K. whereas research and innovation on plant protein need to be scaled up;

L. whereas to create added value for protein plants it is important to have a value chain approach;

A clear need for a comprehensive EU protein strategy to enhance protein potential

1. Calls on the Commission to urgently present a comprehensive EU protein strategy introducing effective measures that enable the increase of the European production of protein in the short-, medium- and long-term;

2. Considers that the EU protein strategy should be based on:

    1. A vision for increased EU protein production;

    2. Better conditions for protein production in the EU;

    3. Developing plant-based and alternative protein for food and feed;

    4. A holistic approach that includes the whole food value chain;

    5. Concrete policy actions;

A visionfor increased EU protein production

3. Underlines that, from a geopolitical and strategic perspective, it is necessary to reduce dependencies on a single or few suppliers;

4. Points out that the protein strategy should acknowledge the sustainable development of all possible protein sources;

5. Highlights that protein production must be acknowledged as a crucial aspect of the EU food system;

6. Considers that the development of plant protein production and alternative sources of protein in the EU is an effective way of addressing many of the environmental and climate challenges that EU is facing;

Better conditions for protein production in the EU

7. Emphasizes that protein production starts with farmers, fishers and aquaculture farmers and therefore these must be in the centre of the strategy;

8. Stresses that the competitiveness of European businesses must increase;

9. Highlights that a competitive agriculture is dependent on sustainable inputs, such as feed additives, good plant material, fertilizers and healthy soils;

10. Recognises the importance of feed additives for potential emission reductions and protein digestion, correct feeding strategies and reformulation of feed;

11. Recalls that it will be impossible to increase the production of plant-based protein without good plant materials;

12. Calls on the Commission to propose medium- and long-term policy measures to close the nutrient loop, such as enabling the use of RENURE products;

13. Recalls that the production of bio--methane, biogas, biofuels or other bio-based chemicals that utilize bio-waste streams is a source of important revenues to fully enhance the value of protein-rich crops and strengthen the business case for farmers;

14. Recognizes that practices of growing and utilizing protein-rich crops often demand new management practices and co-operation between farmers;

15. Stresses that in order to boost investments in healthier soils and new crop rotation practices, long term perspectives and strong ownership rights need to go hand in hand;

Developing plant-based and alternative protein for food and feed

16. Reiterates the big potential of plant-based protein, and that the development of the sector will benefit European farmers, soil quality, biodiversity, climate and human health;

17. Stresses the importance of grasslands as protein source; highlights the relevance of projects that extract high-quality protein as well as biomethanol from grasslands through bio-refining;

18. Is of the opinion that aquaculture is an important producer of protein and that the usage of algae as feed additives is a promising way to reduce the emissions from livestock;

19. Considers that innovative cell-based food can contribute to increasing the protein production and be a complement to agriculture;

20. Stresses that insects should be considered as alternative sources of protein, particularly in animal nutrition;

21. Is of the opinion that authorisations through the novel food legislation solely should be based on the safety of the product;

22. Underlines that policies must create a level playing field between actors and products and that protein consumption must be more sustainable;

23. Calls for more research and development in plant-based and alternative proteins;

A holistic approach that includes the whole food value chain

24. Underlines that improved coordination and collaboration across the actors of the supply chain is needed to bridge the current gaps between farmers, processors and retailers;

25. Reiterates the Farm to Fork target of reducing food waste by 50 %, which could be partly reached with a more circular agriculture;

26. Highlights that protein production in the EU will not increase if there is no market-driven demand for it;

27. Considers that the food-processing industry should map its waste streams in order to be quantifiable and reusable;

28. Recognises that the production of renewable energy is linked to the production of protein;

29. Believes that public procurement should be used in a better way to incentivise a more sustainable protein production and consumption;

30. Stresses that action on all levels is needed in order to increase protein production;

31. Recalls the need to promote effective Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS);

Concrete policy actions

32. Calls on the Commission to put forward the following policy actions:

    i. A feed additive regulation that enables stability and innovations in feed additives;

    ii. A novel food legislation that simplifies and speeds up authorisation processes;

    iii. A directive on waste that enlarges the types of biodegradable waste to be considered as feed and that allows for food production residues to be used and transported;

    iv. A renewable energy directive that allows long-term stable regulation for biofuel production;

    v. An energy taxation directive that provides clear and long-term rules for all bio-based fuels;

    vi. A regulation on new genomic techniques that allows for the take up of new breeding techniques;

    vii. A carbon removal certification framework that enables carbon farming practices related to the growing of protein-rich crops;

    viii. A combination of CAP rules that provide a stable framework, flexible management practices and incentives for production of protein-rich crops, grassland and legumes;

    ix. A front of packing label regulation that compares the carbon footprint of food and feed;

    x. A food protein balance sheet;

    xi. A framework of higher tolerance towards technical difficulties while maintaining high safety levels of processed agricultural products (PAPs);

    xii. A combination of public procurement rules that make it easier to set out minimum sustainability requirements;

    xiii. A clear R&D funding strategy to promote and stimulate market uptake of plant-based proteins for food and feed in the EU;

33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Proteins are essential and indispensable components for balanced and healthy diets, human nutrition and animal feed. Plant proteins are also crucial for the transition towards sustainable food systems, while an increased cultivation of legumes and grasslands contributes to a more sustainable and diversified agriculture and reduces the need for fertiliser inputs.

Furthermore, the processing of protein crops and grasslands into high-level protein meal generates oleaginous by-products which can contribute to the circular economy and be used for human consumption, renewable energy, fertiliser, animal feed or the production of green chemicals. Plant proteins also contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Demand for protein is thus expected to continuously grow both globally and within the EU. The EU has a major production of proteins; for instance, the EU produces 77 % of protein used for feed. However, the EU has a deficit in protein-rich plants, so that only 29 % of the high-protein feed needed to balance livestock feed rations originates from the EU. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have had dramatic effects on global trade and have made it clear that the EU needs to diversify its food supply chains, as pointed out in the Versailles declaration.

Hence, the need becomes clear for a comprehensive EU protein strategy which should enable the increase of the EU production of protein in the short-, medium- and long-term. The rapporteur takes the view that the protein strategy should be based on the following five pillars:

1. A vision for increased EU protein production

Protein production must be acknowledged as a crucial aspect of the EU food system, while the sustainable development of all possible protein sources should be promoted. The dependency on a single or few suppliers should be reduced.

2. Better conditions for protein production in the EU

Farmers must be in the centre of the protein strategy. A competitive agriculture is dependent on sustainable inputs, such as feed additives, good plant material, fertilisers and healthy soils.

In particular, good plant materials are necessary in order to increase the production of plant-based protein. In addition, practices of growing and utilising protein-rich crops often demand new management practices and co-operation between farmers.

3. Developing plant-based and alternative protein for food and feed

The development of the plant-based protein sector will benefit European farmers, soil quality, biodiversity, climate and human health. The protein strategy’s policies must create a level playing field between actors and products. It is crucial to enhance research and development in plant-based and alternative proteins.

4. A holistic approach that includes the whole food value chain

Protein production in the EU will not increase if there is no market-driven demand for it. Improved coordination and collaboration across the actors of the supply chain is therefore

needed to bridge the current gaps between farmers, processors and retailers.

5. Concrete policy actions

The rapporteur suggests that the Commission should put forward a series of policy actions, among which:

- Legislative measuressuch as a feed additive regulation that enables stability and innovations in feed additives; a novel food legislation that simplifies and speeds up authorisation processes; a directive on waste that enlarges the types of biodegradable waste to be considered as feed; a renewable energy directive that allows for long-term stable regulation for biofuel production; a regulation on new genomic techniques; a combination of CAP rules that provide incentives for production of protein-rich crops, grassland and legumes;

- Other policy measuressuch as a food protein balance sheet; a framework of higher tolerance towards technical difficulties while maintaining high safety levels of processed agricultural products (PAPs); a clear R&D funding strategy to promote the market uptake of plant-based proteins for food and feed in the EU.