

Take a Unique Chance for People, our Environment, Agriculture and Economy Now!

"Yes!" to Alternative Proteins – 10-Point-Agenda

Alternative Proteins are a unique opportunity for humans, the environment, the agriculture and the economy. Considering how conventional food production systems impact our world Alternative Proteins are more and more indispensable. *The aim of the „Association for Alternative Protein Sources Germany“ (BALPro e.V.) is to bring together different economical, political and private players who are interested in promoting Alternative Proteins and to jointly drive forward an agricultural and food turnaround free of individual interests. Our „10-Point-Agenda“, aimed at political leaders at all levels, shows how this can be achieved. Because our food production works or fails as a system a procedure for sustainable improvement has to be developed. This requires a differentiated view on the different problem dimensions and needs the courage of all parties involved. According to experts, in the coming years the planned transition of the German energy- and transport-system will produce costs for the federal government and the federal states worth hundreds of billions of Euros. While these policies can be regarded as positive and are welcome and essential to meet the 1,5-degree climate target, there is still a lack of comparable investments in the agriculture- and food-system- transition. This is despite the fact that agriculture, forestry and other land use are responsible for around 23 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the report of the „Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change“. We must act now to secure a pioneering role in the field of sustainable and innovative food solutions from which both the environment and the economy will benefit in the long term.*

Increase Competitiveness

Despite the general downward trend Germany is one of the countries with the most intensive consumption of animal products and the meat and dairy industry is one of the most important national employers. We acknowledge this high socio-economic importance, but we also see that the conventional meat industry is currently not sustainable as far as working conditions, resource consumption and CO₂-emissions are concerned. This endangers the environment, jobs and the economic growth.

I. Reduce Export Dependency

Structural and social changes pose new challenges for the German food industry and increasingly make production systems dependent on exogenous variables over which no or only limited influence can be exerted. The German meat and dairy industry in particular is becoming increasingly dependent on external markets. Production increases, such as those in the South and North American sectors, are causing increased competition on the world market. Global developments, such as the Covid 19 pandemic - to name just one example -, show how sensitively import needs and purchasing power in target markets react to changes. The efforts of many countries to strengthen their own food production are not a good requirement for German meat and dairy exports. For this reason assuring that the German food industry becomes increasingly independent from exports is crucial for the success of our economy.

II. Ensure Sustainability through Differentiation & Innovation

The development of new products based on Alternative Proteins offers the chance of differentiation in global competition. Companies in the field of animal agriculture in particular can efficiently upgrade their own portfolio by integrating plant-based alternatives because of their already existing technical infrastructures. The global engagement against climate change and changing consumer behavior provide sufficient reason to fully embrace those opportunities.

We should take advantage of these opportunities and not only demand a transformation from the affected farmers and companies, but also support them and create incentives for them.

Research and Development

Research and development can be a game changer if existing potentials are bundled and used in a targeted manner. The best conditions for a transformation of our food production systems are met if research funding is holistic and far-sighted and if the corresponding resources are made available at low thresholds. In addition to the high level of procedural and material science competence of German research institutions the importance of digital technologies should be emphasized as well.

III. Promote Multi-Level Transformation

The vegetable protein market in Germany has grown steadily in recent years . This development can be seen as consistently positive. It represents an important intermediate step since it is exemplary of many other options for the ecological improvement of food production through the development of new raw material sources. It also shows that a sustainable transformation is not a "big bang", but takes place in individual steps. After the substitution of a raw material has succeeded and new attractive products have emerged from it, the next step is to optimize the efficiency of raw material extraction. In the case of plant products this means, among other things, promoting the regional cultivation of protein plants and, in the medium term, getting rid of complex and ecologically less beneficial raw material imports. A particularly noteworthy aspect of this transformation step: For German farmers the increased use of regional protein plants such as field beans, lupins and peas in food production would open up a new market with numerous earning opportunities.

Problems such as the reduction of the allergenic potential of raw materials such as lupins, peas and soy are also currently being worked on. A research project devoted to the modification of the taste of vegetable protein while at the same time reducing its allergenic potential is currently conducted at the "Fraunhofer Institute for Process Engineering and Packaging IVV". It is precisely such research projects that will have to be extended and politically funded in the future to ensure that Alternative Protein sources from local plants do not remain a niche product. The example of plant-based alternatives is just one example here, alongside many other options such as cell-based production.

IV. Promote New Information Technologies

Data-based product development, such as that carried out by US-American or Israeli companies, is currently producing Alternative Protein food innovations that convince consumers with their quality, price and taste. In addition to innovations in process engineering there is therefore a high demand in Germany for new information technologies and digital infrastructure, which can sometimes be quite cost-intensive. Consequently an important factor to establish Alternative Proteins is on the one hand a substantial basis in the form of an integrative approach in product development.

On the other hand the aspect of food data must be mentioned in connection with the ecological footprint of food. Instead of "only" debating the implementation of a „Nutri-Score“ we would do well to record the entire data of the value chain (in addition to nutritional values) such as the carbon footprint, water consumption, land use, and energy consumption and make this information available for consumers by displaying it on the food packaging. One example on how this can work is the Swiss startup Eaternity which has developed a software that restaurants, private individuals and companies can use to calculate the carbon footprint of their food. We must bundle such approaches and use them to develop data infrastructures that not only ensure transparency, but also enable actual ecological optimization.

V. Education for Sustainable Development

Food technology and ecotrophological courses that focus on the research and production of Alternative Proteins offer enormous potential for agricultural and nutritional changes. It is particularly important here that training programs teach both nutritional and technological skills. In addition key issues such as supply chain management, corporate communication (with a special focus on science communication) and entrepreneurship should not be neglected in order to train agile „Allrounders“ who not only develop their ideas themselves with a "startup mentality", but are also able to establish them in the system.

VI. Political Support

Political support for research and innovation works best when it is not handled within the classical political system. That's why we call for low-threshold and unbureaucratic funding from which startups and SMEs in particular can benefit. This funding must be systemically oriented, i.e. across all departments and policy areas and taking into account value chains in their entirety. Programs to promote a more sustainable protein supply can only be set up and implemented by overcoming political and economic particular interests. Food production works as a system - so why not promote it systemically?

Clarity

VII. Consider a Consumer Perspective when Debating Freedom in Naming

For years there have been countless debates in Germany about whether a meat-alternative should be allowed to carry the name of the comparable animal-product. The German Butchers' Association (DFV), for example, insists that legal clarification is required to avoid confusion between plant-based and animal products. In addition various existing regulations severely restrict the freedom in naming.

At the same time some consumers find it difficult to understand why plant based products have to be compared to animal products. However the freedom to name alternative products after the animal products that inspired their creation serves an important purpose: It gives consumers orientation and thus the chance to maintain old eating habits whilst incorporating more plant-based food into their diet at the same time. Above that unclear names that do not sound appealing could make vegan and vegetarian products appear less attractive to potential buyers. Furthermore names such as soy milk and soy yogurt are now established on the market and the re-naming of those products could cause confusion among consumers. We therefore demand freedom of naming in order to continue to ensure that veggie burgers and soy milk can gain further social acceptance.

VIII. Differentiating instead of Ideologizing

The industrial production of food is complex and hardly any consumer follow up in detail which processing steps a raw material goes through on the way to the food shelf. Accordingly questions regarding the carbon footprint or the added health value of certain foods are often much more difficult to answer than it appears on the first sight. Especially because of the highly emotional and interest-driven public debate. This leads to uncertainty among consumers who are generally open to alternative protein sources, but hardly get any objective information. We therefore call for clear and factual information offers and campaigns free of particular interests.

Dialog

The market for Alternative Proteins is large and steadily growing, and so are its actors and their interests. It is therefore essential to offer these actors, which include startups and companies as well as food experts and associations, a platform for a constructive exchange. The „Association for Alternative Protein Sources e.V.“ has been moderating the dialogue for two years for a steadily growing group of innovators, interested parties and sponsors. However in order to increase the positive efficiency it is important to involve politicians more actively.

IX. Acknowledge Importance and Urgency

In addition to sustainable funding at state and federal levels politicians must recognize that the agricultural and food turnaround is just as important for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the transport and energy transition. This is the only way to ensure that Alternative Proteins and corresponding production systems play a central role in social discourse. According to a study by the „Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy“ and the environmental organization „Grain“ the world's five largest meat and milk companies produce more CO₂ than oil companies. In order to meet the 1,5-degree-target it is therefore essential that decision-makers not only recognize the importance of the change in our food system, but — in line with this urgency — also respond as quickly as possible with effective political measures.

This is the only way to ensure that Germany becomes a pioneer in the field of meat and milk alternatives and that it will benefit broadly from the development of corresponding niche products. A.T. Kearney predicts that such products will have a market share of around 60 percent in just under 20 years.

X. Conduct Solution-Oriented Dialogues

For a transformation towards a sustainable protein supply the basic conditions must first be created. In our view this can best be done in an institutionalized dialogue between policy fields on different levels (federal, state and local authorities). Individual interests must be overcome without falling back to "simple solutions" that only seem to address the problem by treating symptoms. The „Association for Alternative Protein Sources e.V.“ is ready to offer the actors a platform for this dialogue in order to help secure Germany an international pioneering role in the field of future-oriented nutritional solutions. In the long term this would benefit not only our environment but also our economy and our whole society.