

Billionaires Are Betting That Lab-Grown Meat Is The Future Of Food



Technocrats Bill Gates and Richard Branson are out of touch with reality. After they throw out the false assumptions to population explosion and food scarcity, they conclude that the future of nutrition is artificial meat. Of course, they both happen to be invested in lab-grown meat companies. When Gates concludes that ‘There’s no way to produce enough meat for 9 billion people’, you have to wonder if he understands anything about the livestock industry. □ TN Editor

Vegetarians have long touted the ethical and environmental problems with meat production and consumption. Start-ups such as MosaMeat, JUST and Memphis Meats are tissue-engineering meat in a lab to allow people to enjoy being a carnivore without any of the environmental or ethical hang-ups.

Dubbed clean meat, the efforts are distinct from “fake meat,” like the soy protein “chicken” you can find in your grocery store today. Unlike Morningstar or Boca Burgers, clean meat really is meat; it just grows in a lab instead of being part of an animal. But lab-grown meat leads most skeptical diners to think of a big hurdle: taste.

“When they taste the product, they have to have the experience of meat, not the experience of a product that looks like meat and comes close to meat or has the distinct hints of something that looks like meat,” said Peter Verstrate, the CEO of MosaMeat. “It just has to be meat.”

“The ultimate filter is, ‘Does it taste exactly like the meat you’re used to?’” said Josh Tetrick, CEO of clean meat start-up JUST, who already tasted success with JUST Mayo.

There are two business-world barometers for clean-meat products that are make-or-break as well: price and scale.

Right now clean meat is much more expensive to produce than traditional meat because of scaling and infrastructure. The land, feed, farmers, slaughterhouses and transportation are already in place to produce meat from dead animals. Growing clean meat may be more efficient and will require less total marginal costs in the end, but until the systems needed to grow clean meat on a large scale exist, it will be more expensive.

Investors aren’t deterred by the challenges, with sustainability forecasts chief among their concerns and motivations. Scientists estimate the world population will reach 9.6 billion by the year 2050. This population will increasingly live in urban areas and have a rising middle class, both of which mean more meat consumption. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, world food production will need to increase 70 percent. Feeding that many people with traditional meat production will require double the amount of deforestation, which will increase greenhouse-gas emissions by 77 percent.

Bill Gates has invested in lab-grown meat companies, as has Richard Branson. “Raising meat takes a great deal of land and water and has a substantial environmental impact,” Gates wrote on his personal blog, Gatesnotes.com, a few years ago. “Put simply, there’s no way to produce enough meat for 9 billion people. Yet we can’t ask everyone to become vegetarians. That’s why we need more options for producing meat without depleting our resources.”

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