EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Food safety, sustainability and innovation
Food processing technologies and novel foods

Brussels
SANTE.DDG2/E2/(2023)2357441

Dear Mr. Román, Ms. Blanchard, Mr. Vásquez, Ms. de Rada, Ms. Constantini, Mr. Janowicz and Ms. Larco,

I refer to your letter of 22 February 2023 registered on 24 January 2023 (Ref. Ares(2023)1370865) addressed to Commissioner Kyriakides requesting to cease the recent authorisation of house cricket as a novel food. The Commissioner has asked me to reply on her behalf.

We take note of your comments. Consumers in the European Union have always been, are, and will continue to be free to decide what they eat. It is important however that consumers know that what they eat is safe and that they are well informed about it. A wide, free and safe choice of food corresponds to the aspirations of the European consumers.

With the Novel Food regulation[1], the Commission is making sure that any new product authorised, such as insects, is safe for consumers and properly labelled. Therefore, and before any novel food can be put on the market, it is subject to a strict scientific safety assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The assessment covers the potential biological and chemical hazards as well as allergenicity and environmental hazards associated with farmed insects used as food, taking into account of the entire chain, from farming to the final product.

Currently, there are four insect species authorised under the Novel Food Regulation as they fulfil the conditions laid down in Article 7 of this Regulation. EFSA has concluded in all its scientific opinions that the consumption of the evaluated insect proteins may potentially lead to allergic reactions. It may particularly be the case in people with pre-existing allergies to crustaceans, dust mites and in some cases molluscs. Even in the current absence of conclusive evidence in this regard, the consumer is informed about potential risks of allergenicity, through the labelling provisions for this food, and can thus make an informed choice. Currently, the epidemiological evidence on this authorised insect species to provoke primary sensitisation that could lead to allergic reactions when those insects are consumed, is still limited and equivocal. Therefore, and following the EFSA's recommendation, the Commission is currently exploring ways to

[1] Regulation (EU) 2015/2283 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2015 on novel foods, amending Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 258/97 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1852/2001.

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carry out the necessary research on the allergenicity of insects, including *Acheta domesticus*, under the Horizon Europe[2] research programmes.

As regards animal welfare, there is no conclusive scientific evidence on the sentience of insects. Under the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Commission will revise the EU legislation on the welfare of farmed animals in 2023. So far, the science related to the welfare of farmed insects is not sufficiently developed to allow for an initiative in this area, but the Commission will closely follow the development of this farming activity and the possible welfare issues related to it.

In your letter, you also refer to the Farm to Fork Strategy, in particular to the need for a transition towards a more plant-based diet with less red and processed meat. While this is indeed one of the objectives in terms of facilitating the shift to healthy and sustainable diets, this Strategy also highlights that research and innovation are key drivers in accelerating the transition to sustainable, healthy and inclusive food systems from primary production to consumption. In this context, insect-based proteins are considered one of the key areas of research to increase the availability and source of alternative proteins and thus, the Horizon Europe research programme, as indicated earlier, is being used to enable the transition.

Finally, the expected environmental benefits of rearing insects for food as compared to conventional production animals are founded on the higher feed conversion efficiency of insects, less greenhouse gas emissions, less use of water and arable lands, and the use of insect-based bioconversion as a marketable solution for reducing food waste.

We hope you found this answer informative.

Best regards,

Bruno Gautrais
Head of Unit

[2] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en