European Protein Strategy

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted an own-initiative report by Emma WIESNER (Renew, SE) on a European protein strategy.

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.

Demand for protein is 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, it 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.

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

The Commission is called on to urgently present a **comprehensive and ambitious EU protein strategy** covering the sustainable production and consumption of all types of protein in the EU, especially plant- and animal-based protein, and introducing effective measures to boost open European protein autonomy in the short, medium and long term. The report underlined that the production of protein crops and plant-based protein should be prioritised.

A vision for increased EU protein production

The report noted that European resilience levels need to be significantly strengthened in crucial sectors such as food and feed supply by reducing, as far as possible, dependencies on agricultural products and resources from just one or a few suppliers through stronger domestic production, while encouraging the EU's competitiveness to avoid the concentration of markets in the hands of just a few key players. Therefore, the EU needs to step up the production of plant protein.

Better conditions for protein production in the EU

The report stressed that farmers should be in the centre of the protein strategy. European agriculture and businesses must become more competitive in the area of proteins for food and feed and that the agriculture sector is dependent on sustainable and affordable inputs such as energy, feed, feed additives, good plant material, fertilisers and soils of good quality.

Members called for a swift adoption of a framework tailored to **new breeding techniques** to allow for faster development of new and robust plant varieties, including protein crops.

In addition, the report recalled that the production of **biomethane, biogas, biofuels or other bio-based chemicals** that use biowaste streams is one of the factors contributing to more sustainable production and is a significant revenue source that enhances the value of protein-rich crops and strengthens the business case for farmers to adopt them, while at the same time offering sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels and contributing to a significant reduction in greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions.

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.

Members:

- encourage the production of **soya beans** in the European Union as a source of plant-based protein by incentivising investment in research and development to improve crop quality and yield;

- recognise the strong potential of **hemp** as a sustainable protein crop and stresses the need to harmonise its regulation at EU level to facilitate its cultivation and processing into food and feed;

- highlight the role of sustainable **fishery and aquaculture** sectors in ensuring food security and in diets based on healthy and high-quality protein. Therefore, the Commission should ensure that the upcoming European protein strategy recognises the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

Algae and microalgae can be an important complementary source of protein as part of a sustainable food-production system according to the report. Members called on the Commission to include this in the European protein strategy.

The report stressed that **insects**, provided they meet high safety standards, could be regarded a useful circular alternative source of protein, particularly for organic and conventional animal nutrition, contributing to reducing the EU protein deficit and increasing the circularity of agriculture.

A holistic approach that includes the entire food value chain

Members stressed that improved coordination and collaboration between the supply chain's stakeholders, along the entire value chain, is needed to bridge the current gaps between farmers, processors and retailers. Stronger collective collaborations between the actors, notably through farmers' organisations and agricultural cooperatives, should be actively promoted with a view to shaping higher added value chains.

Furthermore, increased market transparency can improve the functioning of the market, reduce waste and bring about a more circular food sector. In this regard, policy strategies and legislative frameworks should incentivise these markets.

Concrete policy actions

The report called on the Commission to put forward a series of policy actions including:

- legislative measures such as: (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; (iv) a renewable energy directive that allows for long-term stable regulation for biofuel production; (v) an energy taxation directive; (vi) a regulation on new genomic techniques; (vii) a combination of CAP rules that provide incentives for production of protein-rich crops, grassland and legumes;

- other policy measures such as: (i) a food protein balance sheet; (ii) a clear long-term funding strategy for research and development; (iii) a framework to connect the production of plant-based proteins to the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD); (iv) more research into nutritional life cycle assessments (n-LCA) of foods.