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Would you eat meat grown in a lab?

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This meat could save our planet - but are we ready for it?

The race is on to find environmentally and economically viable ways to stave off threats to our food supplies, from overfishing and overconsumption, to factory farming and climate change.

While the solution is already here, it's not quite within reach of the mainstream and, historically, it has seen a bit of resistance from consumers. However, are we suddenly easing into this once-radical idea?

Lab-made meat products are the focus of scientists trying to find affordable, nutritious alternatives to meat, with minimal environmental and animal impact. While **plant-based meat alternatives** are popular among vegetarians and vegans, can we win over meat-eaters to this less destructive alternative?

Crafted from stem cells, lab-grown or 'cultured' meat is biologically identical to regular animal meat, although with the potential to genetically control aspects of the final product, including taste, colour, texture and more.

So-called 'clean meat' has risen to prominence in recent years thanks to researchers like Mark Post and companies like Memphis Meats, whose pursuit of lab-crafted meatballs and chicken received financial backing from Bill Gates and Richard Branson in August 2017.

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We've also seen our first cultured fish start-up, Finless Foods, which aims to tackle over-fishing, rising prices and subsequent exclusion of people who want and need to eat fish but can't afford it.

Food Scientist, Dr Vincent Candrawinata, is keen for there to be mainstream availability of lab-created meat and fish products, however, he's noticed a lot of resistance to the idea in the past.

"In the past, everything that is lab-grown has had a negative image because it screams 'artificial'," he explained.

"[The biggest misconception is] that it's 'unnatural', and anything unnatural equals 'bad'."

Dr Vincent argues lab-made food is not bad for you at all. In fact, it's obviously better than fast foods - which certainly aren't natural - and that opposition on this basis would make it hard for a lot of people to eat a lot of things in our supermarkets, where most of our produce is genetically modified or selectively bred in some way (think: the colour of meat and fish, **the size, shape and appearance of vegetables**).



He also believes that it has the potential to save costs in other parts of the industry and process.

"When you slaughter meat ethically, there are [still] more things to regulate," Dr Vincent explains.

"We have to talk about food safety, macro-biological safety, contamination, we have to talk about nutritional value, we also have to talk about transporting the meat at the correct temperature and stuff like that. So, all of this risk management could actually be minimalised or even eliminated by lab grown meat."



Dr Vincent acknowledges the movement will no doubt impact Australia's farming industry in the long term, but says the government needs to provide assurances to the inevitably changing industry.

"Just because someone agrees with [eating] lab-grown meat, doesn't mean they are the cause of the change. The change is coming," he said.

"If we face the change head on, if the government foresees or predicts the change will come, they have more time to prepare and actually manage what could be an averse, negative result of that change."

The change, of course, will not come overnight, but in the near future we could see both types of meat - lab grown and natural - exist side-by-side in the supermarket.

"[Lab-grown meat] is a choice. It is not the new norm, it is just a choice. Similar to organic farming, it doesn't mean that people who are doing conventional farming are suddenly out of business, because both can exist together in a parallel."

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