

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A
20/01/2026) - IRSA 09 - ALTERNATIVE PROTEINS IN FOOD SYSTEMS
TRANSFORMATIONS

**CONTESTED FUTURES: NARRATIVE DISPUTES OVER ALTERNATIVE
PROTEINS IN BRAZIL**

Paulo André Niederle (pauloniederle@gmail.com)

John Wilkinson (jhn.wlknsn@gmail.com)

Jean Pierre Passos Medaets (jmedaets@gmail.com)

Kamila Guimarães Schneider (kamilaschneider91@gmail.com)

Nathalie Vieira Lucion (nathiluci@gmail.com)

This article examines how competing narratives shape disputes over the future of alternative protein markets in Brazil. Narratives are understood as causal and moralizing stories that project expectations and orient action in contexts of technological, regulatory, and cultural uncertainty. Drawing on 17 interviews, participant observation at key sectoral events, and documentary analysis, the study maps how public agencies, firms, NGOs, and researchers construct imagined futures that, while not predictive, exert real effects on investment, regulation, and corporate strategy. The analysis identifies a plural narrative field structured around five dominant storylines. The “unjustly accused livestock”

narrative mobilizes sovereignty, productivity, and environmental stewardship to contest links between livestock, climate change, and health, advocating incremental innovations (genetics, intensification, methane inhibitors) while rejecting demand-reduction policies. By contrast, the “silver bullet” narrative frames alternative proteins, especially cultivated meat and precision fermentation, as technoscientific solutions capable of rapidly substituting animal agriculture and reducing emissions and animal suffering. “Market pragmatism” shifts attention to feasibility, costs, and consumer acceptance, promoting hybrid products and gradual diffusion paths. “Hijacking” criticizes financialization and risks of corporate capture, while “coexistence and complementarity” envisions a plural food future in which diverse technological routes and production models coexist and adjust to social, environmental, and cultural contexts. Analytically, the study shows how these narratives simplify complex controversies through heroes, villains, and victims, stabilizing reference frames and generating cognitive path dependencies that shape public policy (e.g., labeling rules, testing authorizations, bans) and actor coalitions. Empirically, the Brazilian case reveals a recent shift away from polarized substitutionist claims toward a logic of complementarity, in line with the cooling of early hype and the growing weight of evidence-based regulation.

Palavras-chave: proteins; markets; narratives; meat; food.