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

IS BRIDGING THE PROTEIN GAP IN EUROPE IMPOSSIBLE? DRIVERS AND VULNERABILITIES OF THE EU'S GOVERNMENT OF INSECT INDUSTRY

Paranthoën Jean-Baptiste (jean-baptiste.paranthoen@inrae.fr)

Proteins are essential resources in agri-food supply chains due to the industrialization of livestock farming. In a context shaped by the search for more secure supply sources and the reduction of the ecological footprint of agri-food systems, the “protein transition” is a major current challenge, particularly in Europe. With a negative protein trade balance, Europe is heavily dependent on soybean imports, mainly from Brazil and the United States. This soy-based food system is increasingly criticised for its contribution to deforestation and ecosystem degradation.

The emergence of new production sectors is presented as a way to bridge the European protein gap. Among these, the insect industry has grown significantly since the FAO promoted it as a solution for increasing food and feed production without putting additional pressure on ecosystems. Despite the legitimacy gained by this industry, it is facing major difficulties, as illustrated by the bankruptcy of key firms. To explain these difficulties, this paper mobilises

literature on the EU's government of industries (Jullien and Smith, 2014) and on the role of infrastructures in shaping production systems (Lien, 2015). This framework highlights how European protein government affects firms' infrastructural strategies and their capacity to scale up production.

Empirically, the paper draws on European and French archival sources, interviews with European and French policy officers and with managers and workers of insect-producing firms in Europe, complemented by press articles and financial data. The analysis underlines regulatory and economic constraints shaping three main infrastructural models within the insect industry. It focuses on the premium model, whose large-scale ambitions help explain the financial difficulties encountered by these firms. Ultimately, this contribution sheds light on both the drivers and vulnerabilities of industrialisation processes of new proteins.

Palavras-chave: new proteins; european protein gap; infrastructural strategy; regulatory framework.