

Once science fiction, lab-grown meat coming to US restaurants this year

REUTERS

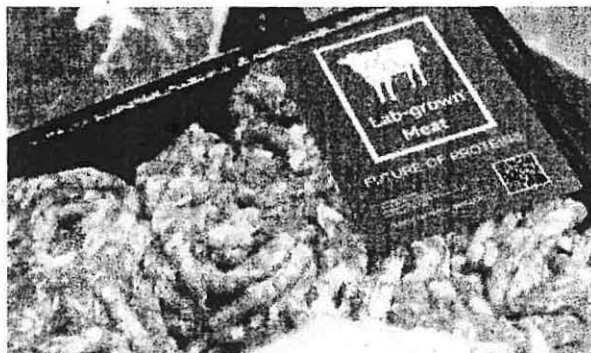
Washington, 23 January

Once the stuff of science fiction, lab-grown meat could become reality in some restaurants in the US this year.

Executives at cultivated meat firms are optimistic that meat grown in massive steel vats could be on the menu within months after a company won the go-ahead from a key regulator.

In a show of confidence, some of them have signed up high-end chefs to eventually showcase the meats in their high-end eateries.

But to reach its ultimate destination - supermarket shelves - cultivated meat faces big obstacles, five executives told *Reuters*. Firms must attract more funding to increase production, which would enable them to offer their beef steaks and chicken breasts at a more affordable price. Along the way, they



must overcome a reluctance among some consumers to even try lab-grown meat.

Cultivated meat is derived from a small sample of cells collected from livestock, which is then fed nutrients, grown in enormous steel vessels called bioreactors, and processed into something that looks and tastes like a real cut of meat.

Only Singapore has so far approved the product for retail sale. But the US is poised

to follow. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said in November that a cultivated meat product - a chicken breast grown by California-based UPSIDE Foods - was safe for human consumption.

UPSIDE is now hoping to bring its product to restaurants as soon as 2023 and to grocery stores by 2028.

UPSIDE still needs to be inspected by the US Department of Agriculture's

Food Safety and Inspection Service and get sign-off from the agency on its labels. A USDA FSIS spokesperson declined to comment on its inspection timeline.

'Slaughterless house'

At UPSIDE's facility in Emeryville, California, meat is harvested and processed in a room that chief executive officer Uma Valeti calls the "slaughterless house," where it is inspected and tested.

California-based GOOD Meat already has an application pending with the FDA. Two other firms, Netherlands-based Mosa Meat and Israel-based Believer Meats, said they are in discussions with the agency.

The FDA declined to provide details of pending cultivated meat applications but confirmed it is talking to multiple companies.

The biggest challenge companies face is growing the

nascent supply chain for the nutrient mix to feed cells and for the massive bioreactors required to produce large quantities of cultivated meat, executives said.

For now, production is limited. UPSIDE's facility has the capacity to churn out 400,000 pounds of cultivated meat per year, a small fraction of the 106 billion pounds of conventional meat and poultry produced in the US in 2021, according to the North American Meat Institute.

The cultivated meat sector has so far raised nearly \$2 billion in investments globally, according to data collected by the Good Food Institute (GFI), a research group focused on alternatives to conventional meat.

Investment in the industry so far has been led by venture capital firms and major food companies like JBS SA, Tyson Foods, and Archer-Daniels-Midland Corporation.