

TITOLO: Companies' and Food Chains' Performance in Alternative Protein sector

Progetto di ricerca

Alternative protein products are becoming increasingly relevant in the transition towards more sustainable food systems. They include proteins from plant-based, microbial, fungal, ocean-based and insect-based sources, as well as cultured meat and seafood produced through cellular agriculture.

The development of the sector depends not only on technological innovation and consumer acceptance, but also on the ability of companies and food chains to build competitive, economically viable and sustainable business models. Alternative protein value chains involve several actors, including ingredient suppliers, technology providers, food manufacturers, start-ups, established food companies, retailers and food-service operators.

The sector is also characterized by rapid changes in its company landscape. New firms enter the market, while some start-ups fail, exit, are acquired or merge with larger companies. Mergers and acquisitions, strategic investments and partnerships may contribute to market consolidation and reshape the structure of alternative protein value chains. Understanding these dynamics is important for assessing firms' survival, growth, competitiveness and long-term resilience.

Different strategies, including specialization, vertical integration, partnerships, investment and product positioning, may influence firms' performance and capacity to scale. At the same time, regulation, technological development and changing consumer demand can significantly affect business and supply-chain performance.

Thus, there is a need to:

- analyse the economic performance, survival and development of companies operating in the alternative protein sector;
- investigate business models, market strategies and supply-chain relationships;
- examine firm entry and exit, start-up failure, mergers and acquisitions, and market consolidation;
- assess how investment, innovation, regulation and consumer demand influence company and food-chain performance;
- identify business and supply-chain configurations that can support competitive and sustainable growth.

The researcher will support activities aimed at:

- conducting literature and sector reviews on company performance, business models, market dynamics and food-chain organization;
- collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data on companies, products, markets and supply chains;
- analysing firm dynamics, including start-up development and failure, mergers and acquisitions, partnerships, investment and market consolidation;
- analysing company strategies, including vertical integration, innovation and market positioning;
- engaging with companies and other food-chain actors through interviews, focus groups and case studies;
- preparing scientific papers, reports, case studies and other research outputs.

Piano di attività

The researcher's activities will focus on the economic, managerial and supply-chain dimensions of the alternative protein sector. In particular, he/she will contribute to:

- (i) statistical and economic analysis of companies, products and markets in the European alternative protein sector;
- (ii) analysis of company dynamics, including firm entry and exit, start-up survival and failure, mergers and acquisitions, investments and consolidation processes;
- (iii) literature reviews on company performance, business models and food supply chains;
- (iv) qualitative analysis of interviews and focus groups using software such as NVivo;
- (v) data collection through interviews and focus groups with agri-food companies and other supply-chain actors in Italian and English;
- (vi) analysis of market and consumer data, including prices, product characteristics, market positioning and consumer trends;
- (vii) analysis of company and supply-chain case studies, including partnerships, vertical integration, investment and innovation strategies;
- (viii) data processing using multivariate statistical techniques, including factor analysis, cluster analysis and regression.

The research activity will be conducted in English. The research fellow will work on FEASTS, funded by Horizon Europe (Grant Agreement Project 101083961).

The activities will be carried out under the supervision of Prof. Antonella Samoggia, scientific project leader and mentor

