The Illinois Alternative Protein Innovation Task Force

Final Report

June 30, 2025

Illinois Alternative Protein Innovation Task Force: Final Report

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Introduction:

Alternative proteins–proteins made from plants, animal cells, or via fermentation–represent an opportunity for Illinois to expand food production, continue to grow our economy and workforce, and deliver additional benefits for farmers, food producers, and consumers alike. For Illinois, a state with deep agricultural roots with traditional animal agriculture, world-class research institutions, and a robust manufacturing base, alternative protein innovation presents another opportunity. By supporting this sector, Illinois policymakers can unlock new markets for crops and agricultural byproducts, create high-quality jobs across rural and urban areas, and position the state as a national leader in sustainable food production and biomanufacturing.

About Alternative Proteins:

Fermentation is a powerful, flexible process using microorganisms to produce food. Biomass fermentation efficiently produces large amounts of protein-rich food, while precision fermentation produces specific proteins, fats, flavor molecules, and vitamins. Fermentation technology, which has established applications across food and medicine, can leverage crops and crops sidestreams as feedstocks for protein-rich food.

Plant-based food manufacturing produces food from crops and plant ingredients. Plant-based food production is resource-efficient and adaptable, directly converting plants into plant-based meat, dairy, and other products.

Cultivated meat produces food directly from animal cells, using inputs like those that build muscle and fat in livestock—and is deployable in diverse settings.

About the Task Force:

Governor Pritzker established the Illinois Alternative Protein Innovation Task Force in 2023 in recognition of Illinois' emerging leadership in the sector–with over two dozen companies, research and innovation expertise, and regional assets. The Task Force was established by Public Act 103-0543, the first standalone legislation promoting alternative proteins to become law in the United States. Bringing together experts from academia, biotechnology, agriculture, and non-governmental organizations, the Task Force is charged with evaluating the state of the alternative protein sector in Illinois and to identify and evaluate opportunities that the protein

innovation and the alternative protein industry offer in the State. The Task Force is also charged with identifying a roadmap for the state to unlock potential of the sector, with specific recommendations.

Statutory requirement: "The Task Force shall study and draft a report on how the State may best support the growing alternative protein industry in the State. The Task Force shall:

I. Examine the potential economic development benefits and job creation potential of the plant-based protein, cultivated meat, and fermented protein industries in the State;
II. Identify the environmental impacts of alternative proteins and their supply chains;
III. Examine if alternative proteins can strengthen the State's food resilience;
IV. Assess how alternative proteins may affect individual health, public health, and food security in the State; and
V. Identify ways the State may foster the growth of the emerging alternative protein industry, including by reviewing past and present efforts made to support the broader biotech and life science industries."

This final report compiles the Task Force's findings and recommendations.

Illinois' Advantage:

In the past year alone, Illinois has established this first-of-its-kind Task Force, secured a competitive $51 million grant from the Department of Commerce for the development of a regional tech hub in fermentation, and bundled significant state and private funding in support of building a regional bioeconomy.[1] These developments form a foundation on which the state can expand through an innovative, future-proof agricultural and manufacturing industry.

The State of Illinois has natural advantages in supporting the development of an alternative protein industry, as well as advantages in reaping the benefits of such an industry. Illinois' strong university and research ecosystem already draws bright minds, concentrating innovation and access to academic resources, while the state's business-friendly policies and robust infrastructure prompt entrepreneurship and innovation. Alternative proteins require access to agricultural commodities, such as corn, soy, and wheat, as well as sidestreams from those crops, and the manufacturing of alternative proteins requires skilled labor and access to capital. Illinois is able to provide these resources, and benefits in turn from the new crop markets and jobs this sector can bring.

[1] State of Illinois. "Gov. Pritzker, IL Congressional Leaders Announce iFAB Awarded $51 million EDA Tech Hubs Grant." https://www.illinois.gov/news/press-release.30189.html.

Leadership in a new industry brings not only jobs, markets, and academic progress, but the opportunity to shape the formation of the field to benefit Illinoisans systematically. All forms of alternative proteins—whether plant-based, cultivated, or derived from fermentation—are undergoing product development and process optimization, often using the resources and workforce most convenient. At the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory develops new processes and products through fermentation, Illinois-grown corn processed in Illinois facilities is most convenient, and commercializing the resulting findings could result in new corn markets and facilities located in the vicinity.

Overall Industry Landscape:

There are more than 2,000 companies involved in the alternative protein sector globally, as of 2024.[2] All-time investment in companies dedicated to producing plant-based proteins reached $8.4 billion in 2024. For companies focused on fermentation for alternative proteins, all-time investment reached $4.8 billion. All-time investment for cultivated meat companies totaled $3 billion.[3]

In the United States, the plant-based food retail market totaled $8.1 billion in 2024, more than double what it was just seven years ago. Globally, retail sales of plant-based proteins rose to $28.6 billion.[4]

Illinois is home to 30 companies that produce alternative protein products. Illinois ranks third in the country in number of companies in the sector.[5] There are many other companies in the state working across the value chain to produce alternative proteins including through investments in plant-based protein production, research collaborations, and innovation centers that support the state's growing food and biomanufacturing ecosystem.

Illinois is among the U.S. states best suited to host the core of a growing protein sector and has demonstrated nationally leading supportive policies to build alternative proteins into a mainstream industry. Alternative proteins stand to benefit from policy support from the state

[2] Good Food Institute. 2024. "Alternative Protein Company Database." https://gfi.org/resource/alternative-protein-company-database.
[3] Good Food Institute. 2025. "State of Alternative Protein Series." https://gfi.org/state-of-alternative-proteins.
[4] Good Food Institute. 2025. "State of the Industry: Plant-Based Meat, Seafood, Eggs, Dairy, and Ingredients." https://gfi.org/resource/plant-based-meat-eggs-and-dairy-state-of-the-industry.
[5] Good Food Institute. 2024. "Alternative Protein Company Database." https://gfi.org/resource/alternative-protein-company-database; Good Food Institute. "The Alternative Protein Ecosystem." https://ecosystem.gfi.org.

of Illinois, which can help these businesses reach development milestones, site new facilities, and commercialize products. This presents a ripe opportunity for Illinois to lead the nation by supporting alternative proteins through public investment and other policies.

Economic Benefits:

Alternative proteins present an economic opportunity for Illinois. These new food production systems are projected to yield considerable regional benefits to early adopters, including new jobs, increased tax revenues, and new markets for local crops. McKinsey estimates the fermentation-derived protein market alone could reach $100–$150 billion annually by 2050, making up about four percent of total protein production.[6] Illinois is already capturing a share of this future production through the state's active company base, research facilities, and ongoing farmer engagement.

The alternative protein sector can drive job creation in both agriculture and manufacturing. A report from the Climateworks Foundation estimates that a worldwide shift to alternative proteins could generate 10 million jobs globally by 2030 and up to 83 million by 2050.[7] Several of the alternative protein companies in Illinois have contributed to increased employment through their local operations, boosting both the Chicago-area workforce, rural agricultural production, and broader state employment in manufacturing and infrastructure.

Alternative proteins can further support Illinois agriculture by creating additional markets for the state's primary crops and their sidestreams. Corn and soybeans, Illinois' top crops, are essential ingredients in both traditional animal proteins and many alternative protein formulations, offering farmers another way to diversify their income and hedge against commodity price fluctuations or trade disruptions.[8] Sidestreams from protein production processes are further unlocking value from agricultural inputs.[9] With potential tax revenue increases and new agricultural value chains, the economic benefits of alternative proteins could be both broad and deep across Illinois communities.

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[6] Aminetzah, Daniel, John Levene, Tom Brennan, and Kate Toews. 2025. "Ingredients for the Future: Bringing the Biotech Revolution to Food." McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/agriculture/our-insights/ingredients-for-the-future-bringing-the-biotech-revolution-to-food.

[7] Global Methane Hub & ClimateWorks Foundation. 2023. "Global Innovation Needs Assessment: Food System Methane." https://www.climateworks.org/ginas-methane.

[8] Good Food Institute. 2024. "How Alternative Proteins Expand Opportunities for Farmers and Agriculture." https://gfi.org/resource/alternative-proteins-for-farmers-and-agriculture.

[9] Good Food Institute. 2023. "Cultivating Alternative Proteins from Commodity Crop Sidestreams." https://gfi.org/resource/cultivating-alternative-proteins-from-commodity-crop-sidestreams.

Environmental Impacts:

Alternative proteins offer significant environmental benefits, addressing key issues such as climate change, land degradation, and water pollution. Alternative protein production—both plant-based proteins and utilizing cultivated meat—is resource-efficient (particularly land-use) and offers a path to grow protein production while limiting greenhouse gas emissions.[10, 11, 12, 13]

According to studies by organizations such as the World Bank,[10] UNEP,[11] and BCG,[12] including alternative proteins in a diversified protein portfolio can play a vital role in meeting state and national decarbonization goals. Illinois, which has committed to net-zero GHG emissions by 2050, stands to gain significantly by investing in and scaling these innovations.[13]

The ecological benefits of alternative proteins are particularly important for a largely agricultural state like Illinois. Illinois stands to gain new opportunities for conservation, regenerative agriculture, sustainable water use, and improved crop yields through topsoil recovery.[14] Furthermore, sidestream valorization—using current agricultural byproducts as feedstocks for alternative protein production—adds to the sector's positive impact on sustainability by promoting a circular economy.

Several Illinois-based companies have conducted life cycle assessments (LCAs) to quantify the environmental benefits of their products. Results from these and similar LCAs demonstrate the feasibility and promise of alternative proteins as a component in building a more sustainable and resilient food system. Illinois has the tools, talent, and incentives to be a national model in aligning economic growth with environmental responsibility.

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[10] Sutton, William R., Alexander Lotsch, and Ashesh Prasann. 2024. "Recipe for a Livable Planet: Achieving Net Zero Emissions in the Agrifood System." World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/406c71a3-c13f-49cd-8f3f-a071715858fb.

[11] United Nations Environment Programme. 2023. "What's Cooking? An Assessment of The Potential Impacts of Selected Novel Alternatives to Conventional Animal Products." https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/44236.

[12] Morach, Benjamin, et al. 2022. "The Untapped Climate Opportunity in Alternative Proteins." Boston Consulting Group, MA. https://www.bcg.com/publications/2022/combating-climate-crisis-with-alternative-protein.

[13] Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2025. "IDNR Climate Action Plan." https://dnr.illinois.gov/outreach/climate-action-plan.html.

[14] Good Food Institute. 2023. "Environmental Impacts of Alternative Proteins." https://gfi.org/resource/environmental-impacts.

Food Security & Resilience:

Alternative proteins are an agricultural innovation that can complement current protein production and help meet growing food demand. The planet will near 10 billion people by 2050, and we can expect significant increases in food and protein demand globally. Meat consumption worldwide is projected to rise by at least 50 percent by 2050 from 2012 levels.[15] Given finite land and water resources, we are unable to scale up existing meat production indefinitely.[16] According to Cargill, by 2050, agriculture will need to feed 50 percent more people and produce 70 percent more food, but use only 10 percent more land.[16] That additional demand will be met by a combination of innovation in traditional animal agriculture, as well as by emerging alternative protein innovations.

In addition, advancing plant-based protein and cultivated meat production, alongside conventional protein production, improves food security by fostering supply chain resilience. Alternative protein production processes require fewer inputs and supply chain links, as detailed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and as such, diversified protein production with alternative proteins can reduce supply chain vulnerabilities to zoonotic diseases and agricultural bioterrorism.[17]

Addressing Food Insecurity in Illinois

Food insecurity remains a significant challenge in Illinois. Currently, one in eight residents faces hunger, and the situation is even more severe for children—one in six experiences food insecurity.[18] Food insecurity disproportionately impacts Black and Hispanic households.[19] Compounding this issue, nearly 3 million Illinoisans—approximately one in four—live in food deserts, areas with limited access to healthy and affordable food options.[20]

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[15] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 2018. "The Future of Food and Agriculture—Alternative Pathways to 2050. Supplementary Material." Rome, Italy. https://www.fao.org/3/CA1564EN/CA1564EN.pdf.

[16] North American Meat Institute (NAMI). "Alternative Proteins: Consumer Trends and Industry Innovation." 2021. https://learn.meatinstitute.org/sites/default/files/documents/webinars/Alternative_Proteins_Consumer_Trends_and_Industry_Innovation.pdf.

[17] Swanson, Zane, Caitlin Welsh, and Joseph Majkut. 2023. "Mitigating Risk and Capturing Opportunity: The Future of Alternative Proteins." Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, DC. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-05/230511_Swanson_Alternative_Proteins.pdf?VersionId=Za76gtRSXe0eahjwFvr5hw54uHzCXuT5.

[18] Feeding America. "Illinois." https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/illinois.

[19] Greater Chicago Food Depository. 2024. "Statement on the Release of the USDA's Household Food Security Report for 2023." https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/news/statement-on-the-release-of-the-usdas-household-food-security-report-for-2023.

[20] Office of Governor JB Pritzker. 2024. "Gov. Pritzker Announces New Illinois Grocery Initiative Grant Opportunity." https://gov.illinois.gov/news/press-release.29873.html.

A major driver of this crisis is the rising cost of food.[21] As prices climb, many families struggle to afford nutritious meals. In this context, alternative proteins, alongside conventional protein production, offer a promising solution. When produced at scale, these proteins have the potential to serve as affordable sources of nutrition, helping to meet the dietary needs of vulnerable populations. Public investment in alternative proteins can accelerate this potential by driving down production costs and improving accessibility.

Moreover, integrating alternative proteins into the food system enhances resilience and protects consumers.[17] Expanding plant-based, fermentation-derived, and cultivated protein options as part of a diversified protein supply reduces vulnerability to disruptions caused by disease outbreaks, climate events, and market fluctuations. The University of Chicago's Innovation Commission on Climate Change, Food Security, and Agriculture highlights this opportunity in its report, *Innovation Case for COP28: Alternative Proteins*. The report notes that alternative proteins "can help relieve food insecurity by reducing the risk of food price spikes from animal feed demands."[22] As Illinois develops strategies to combat food insecurity, leveraging alternative proteins as part of a diversified protein supply should be considered.

Public Health & Nutrition:

A diet that combines plant and animal protein sources complement the nutritional value of the diet by optimizing protein quality and inherent benefits of both animal and plant-based protein products.

Plant-based proteins offer some nutritional benefits to consumers. Plant-based protein has no cholesterol, and some varieties are low in saturated fat, which has an even stronger link to LDL (unhealthy) cholesterol in blood.[23] Some plant-based products are also good sources of dietary fiber, which is important for cardiovascular and gut health and is underconsumed by the majority of Americans.[24] The selection of plant-based protein products is mainly motivated by

[21] Greater Chicago Food Depository. 2024. "Statement on the Release of the USDA's Household Food Security Report for 2023." https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/news/statement-on-the-release-of-the-usdas-household-food-security-report-for-2023.
[22] The University of Chicago. 2023. "Innovation Case for COP28: Alternative Proteins." https://innovationcommission.uchicago.edu/research_briefs/alternative-proteins.
[23] World Health Organization. 2023. "Saturated Fatty Acid and Trans-Fatty Acid Intake for Adults and Children: WHO Guideline." https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/370419/9789240073630-eng.pdf?sequence=1.
[24] Anderson, James. et al. 2009. "Health Benefits of Dietary Fiber." Nutr Rev 67, 188–205. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19335713.

personal preferences such as vegan and vegetarian diets or due to nutritional recommendations.[25]

Plant Proteins as Key Contributors to Good Health

Food proteins are macronutrients that provide essential amino acids and energy. They are also considered as a source of bioactive peptides, which can exert a wide range of beneficial biological activities—such as antihypertensive, antioxidative, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, memory improvement, antidepression, antidiabetic, anticancer, and immunomodulatory activities. Plant-based proteins can be extracted from a wide range of sources. Pulses, in particular, are a key source, and numerous commercially available and patented ingredients and food products now feature pulse-based proteins and peptides. These products have been associated with health benefits such as reducing risk factors for various non-communicable diseases.[26]

Nutritional organizations such as the American Heart Association[27] recommend that most daily protein intake should come from plant sources. According to the USDA 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans,[28] plant-based foods are recommended as part of a healthy dietary pattern, comprising the consumption of diverse products, such as common beans, peas, chickpeas, and lentils, among others. Plant-based diets are also rich in fiber, which improves gastrointestinal health and positively affects satiety and appetite; the elevated nitrate content of selected plant sources positively regulates blood pressure. Moreover, the amino acid composition of some plant-based proteins improves sugar and fat metabolism.[29]

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[25] Xiao, Xiao, Peng-Ren Zou, Fei Hu, Wen Zhu, and Zhao-Jun Wei. 2023. "Updates on Plant-Based Protein Products as an Alternative to Animal Protein: Technology, Properties, and Their Health Benefits." Molecules, 28(10), 4016. https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules28104016.
[26] Luzardo-Ocampo, Ivan and Elvira Gonzalez de Mejia. 2025. "Plant Proteins and Peptides as Key Contributors to Good Health: A Focus on Pulses." Food Research International 211,116346 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2025.116346.
[27] American Heart Association. 2025. "Protein in Plants? It's in There – and Here's Why You Should Try It." https://www.heart.org/en/news/2025/02/26/protein-in-plants-its-in-there-and-heres-why-you-should-try-it.
[28] U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2020. "Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 and Online Materials." https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/resources/2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-online-materials.
[29] Luzardo-Ocampo, Ivan and Elvira Gonzalez de Mejia. 2025. "Plant Proteins and Peptides as Key Contributors to Good Health: A Focus on Pulses." Food Research International 211,116346 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2025.116346.

Strategies to Improve Nutritional and Functional Value

Optimizing the nutritional quality of protein sources is essential, and food companies worldwide are working on improving products' protein profile. Despite deficiency of essential amino acids, selected pulses can satisfy amino acid requirements.[30] Cereal and pulse mixtures are an effective fortification strategy to achieve appropriate amino acid levels, adding nutritional value to industrial food products such as bakery products and pasta. [31] Protein quality differs substantially among plant species, some of which can offer nutritionally balanced protein alternatives to achieve required daily requirements.[32]

The processing of plant-based proteins can increase their biological value.[31] Structural and technological modifications[33] to improve digestibility and amino acid levels, among other factors, are alternatives for the agricultural sector and the food industry. Plant-based proteins can be modified through various methods such as thermal denaturation to generate products with enhanced nutritional or functional properties.[34] Chemical modifications of plant-based proteins can also improve functionality, reduce beany flavors, and change the structural properties of proteins. Finally, biological modifications such as enzymatic modification and fermentation enhance protein techno-functionality, decrease allergens and antinutritional compounds, and promote nutritional and antioxidant properties.[35]

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[30] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 2013. "Dietary Protein Quality Evaluation in Human Nutrition." FAO Food and Nutrition Paper, 92, 1–66. https://www.fao.org/ag/humannutrition/35978-02317b979a686a57aa4593304ffc17f06.pdf.

[31] Kumar, Manoj, et al. 2022. "Plant-Based Proteins and Their Multifaceted Industrial Applications." LWT, 154, 112620. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lwt.2021.112620.

[32] Schmidt, Davi, Marta Regina Verruma-Bernardi, Victor Augusto Forti, and Maria Teresa Mendes Ribeiro Borges. 2021. "Quinoa and Amaranth as Functional Foods: A Review." Food Reviews International, 39(4), 2277-2296. https://doi.org/10.1080/87559129.2021.1950175.

[33] Nikbakht Nasrabadi, Maryam, Ali Sedaghat Doost, and Raffaele Mezzenga. 2021. "Modification Approaches of Plant-Based Proteins to Improve Their Techno-Functionality and Use in Food Products." Food Hydrocolloids, 118, 106789. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodhyd.2021.106789.

[34] Langyan, Sapna, Pranjal Yadava, Fatima Nazish Khan, Zahoor A. Dar, Renu Singh, and Ashok Kumar. 2022. "Sustaining Protein Nutrition Through Plant-Based Foods." Frontiers in Nutrition, 8, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2021.772573; Mir, Nisar A., Charanjit S. Riar, and Sukhcharn Singh. 2020. "Structural Modification in Album (Chenopodium Album) Protein Isolates Due to Controlled Thermal Modification and its Relationship with Protein Digestibility and Functionality." Food Hydrocolloids, 103, 105708. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodhyd.2020.105708.

[35] Nivala, Outi, Outi E. Mäkinen, Kristiina Kruus, Emilia Nordlund, and Dilek Ercili-Cura. 2017. "Structuring Colloidal Oat and Faba Bean Protein Particles Via Enzymatic Modification." Food Chemistry, 231, 87–95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodchem.2017.03.114; Schlegel, Katharina, Katharina Sontheimer, Andrea Hickisch, Ali Abas Wani, Peter Eisner, and Ute Schweiggert-Weisz. 2019. "Enzymatic Hydrolysis of Lupin Protein Isolates—Changes in the Molecular Weight Distribution, Technofunctional Characteristics, and Sensory Attributes." Food Science & Nutrition, 7(8), 2747–2759. https://doi.org/10.1002/fsn3.1139.

How Illinois Can Support the Alternative Protein Industry:

Illinois has already established a strong foundation for leadership in the alternative protein space. An analysis of current state programs reveals a range of opportunities, including state grants, loan programs, and tax credits, relevant to alternative protein producers and investors.[36] Building on this groundwork, the state is well positioned to adopt targeted, high-impact policy measures that address industry challenges and foster a thriving food innovation ecosystem.

The Illinois Alternative Protein Innovation Task recommends advancing the following six policy goals:

1. **Expand access to capital for infrastructure development through grants, loans, and tax incentives.**

The clearest and most consistent message from stakeholders was that access to capital for building and upgrading manufacturing infrastructure remains a major barrier to industry growth. Companies across the spectrum—whether early-stage startups or established producers—cited capital expenditure for facilities and equipment as their most pressing need. Illinois can support this through state grants, loans, and tax incentives targeted at alternative protein production facilities, including both company-owned facilities and third-party contract manufacturers. These should include support for leasing equipment, building new infrastructure, and retrofitting existing facilities.

2. **Fund alternative protein research and development at Illinois' leading research institutions.**

Significant public investments in alternative protein research and development (R&D) are essential to accelerate the sector's growth. Publicly funded research on plant-based, cultivated, and other alternative proteins can serve the entire industry by addressing foundational scientific and technical questions. Illinois' research institutions are at the forefront of the field, equipped with the expertise to tackle key technological and scaling challenges. Open-access research and strong industry collaboration, including at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Northwestern University, are driving innovations that support the continued advancement of Illinois' alternative protein sector.[37]

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[36] Good Food Institute. 2025. "Illinois State Programs." https://gfi.org/resource/illinois-state-programs.
[37] Good Food Institute. "The Alternative Protein Ecosystem." https://ecosystem.gfi.org.

3. **Incentivize workforce development programs such as apprenticeships, internships, or industrial graduate programs.**

Many stakeholders noted that industry-academic workforce development partnerships are an important source of talent and suggested further expansion of workforce development programs within Illinois institutions to build a pipeline to the alternative protein industry. The state could support workforce development programs such as apprenticeships, internships, or industrial graduate programs by providing incentives to institutions and companies who participate in these programs, and by facilitating matchmaking between job seekers and the alternative protein sector. Participants also suggested the provision of bioreactors and other equipment to community colleges and other institutions to prepare the Illinois workforce for careers in food technology.

With its leading culinary education institutions, Illinois also has an opportunity to support alternative protein demand by ensuring that chefs are sufficiently trained to cook with alternative protein products. Tax incentives and grants for institutions that develop plant-based cooking curricula would support chef engagement and provide a competitive edge to Illinois-based culinary schools.

4. **Ensure that Illinois' current policies and programs receive sufficient appropriations and are accessible to the alternative protein sector.**

Industry stakeholders noted that Illinois' business-friendly environment and pre-existing state incentives were key factors in their decisions to locate headquarters and facilities in Illinois. Illinois policies have been effective in attracting and retaining business in the state—and doubling down on this success will ensure that Illinois cements its position as a national leader in alternative protein innovation.

Major state initiatives like the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory (IBRL) and the Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture Biomanufacturing Tech Hub (iFAB) have supported the growth of many companies—including alternative protein companies and the broader biomanufacturing sector—and serve as a draw to Illinois. iFAB is a partnership between regional industry and academic partners to scale precision fermentation to convert underutilized corn feedstocks into high-value products, including alternative proteins. The state should continue to support and increase funding to IBRL and iFAB to maintain Illinois leadership.

The legislature should appropriate funds for programs authorized by HB5460, which established a Biomanufacturing Equity Investment Fund, a Biomanufacturing Loan Fund, and a

Biomanufacturing Grant Fund. These programs, which have already been authorized in statute but have not yet received funding, could incentivize alternative protein manufacturing in Illinois.

Industry stakeholders praised Illinois programs, including the Innovation Voucher Program, Illinois INVENT Program, the building materials sales tax exemption, and the EDGE tax credit. The state should continue to ensure these programs are funded and accessible, and consider adding filtering by industry or organization to webpages like the Illinois Catalog of State Financial Assistance to make programs more easily identified by potential applicants.

Case study: The Reimagining Energy and Vehicles (REV) Illinois Program

Illinois' Reimagining Energy and Vehicles (REV) Illinois Program offers incentives to expand in or relocate to Illinois for companies that manufacture electric vehicles, associated batteries, charging infrastructure, recycling products, and renewable energy technologies—such as solar, hydrogen, wind, energy storage, and green steel manufacturing. Incentives include income tax withholding, exemptions on utility taxes, tax credits, training credits, grants, and equipment and capital cost exemptions. Like the electric vehicle and renewable energy sectors, alternative protein production results in far fewer greenhouse gas emissions than conventional production methods. A similar program that focused on the alternative protein industry and collated various financial incentives would be impactful for attracting and retaining business in Illinois.

5. **Boost demand for Illinois-produced alternative protein products by leveraging public procurement channels.**

The State of Illinois can additionally implement public procurement measures to support its growing alternative protein industry. By incentivizing and expanding the procurement of alternative protein products for state facilities and (when applicable) institutions like school districts, universities, correctional facilities, and hospitals, Illinois could support demand for nutritious and locally produced products. Measures include establishing targets for alternative protein procurement or preferring or requiring bids for meals with alternative proteins in public institutions.

HB4089 went into effect in 2023 and requires that school districts offer a plant-based lunch option that meets federal nutrition requirements to any student who submits a request. This legislation has been an effective start to expanding access to plant-based foods in Illinois. It could be further expanded to require schools to offer plant-based meal options to all students, without the need for advance requests. Illinois can also look to other states for precedent in supporting plant-based eating. In 2022, the California Legislature invested $100 million to

support schools in procuring plant-based foods, as well as sustainably, locally produced foods, and $600 million to upgrade kitchen infrastructure and train foodservice workers.

As part of important efforts to expand access to plant-based eating, alternative protein products like plant-based meat should be considered for procurement. Several alternative protein companies are already successfully supplying school districts and other public institutions nationwide. In 2024, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) partnered with Rebellyous Foods to serve plant-based chicken and waffles in approximately 100 of its schools—coinciding with National Nutrition Month.[38]

6. **Ensure that Illinois' regulatory environment remains supportive.**

Illinois should continue to ensure a supportive regulatory environment for the alternative protein sector. The legislature should reject proposals to ban any alternative protein product and reject any proposals that impose additional labeling rules for alternative protein products beyond those set by USDA and/or FDA.

We also recommend increasing staffing, resources, and transparency to provide support to companies navigating permitting requirements.

[38] Vegconomist. 2024. "Rebellyous Foods Partners with Chicago Schools to Serve Plant-Based Chicken for National Nutrition Month." https://vegconomist.com/gastronomy-food-service/food-service/rebellyous-foods-partners-chicago-schools-plant-based-chicken-national-nutrition-month.

Conclusion:

Illinois is at a pivotal juncture to lead the next wave of food system innovation by advancing alternative protein innovation alongside traditional protein production. The state's current strengths with traditional agriculture, vibrant research institutions, and growing ecosystem of alternative protein companies create an opportunity for next-generation development, and economic growth, and improved sustainability and public health.

By investing strategically in infrastructure, access to capital, research, and workforce development—building and expanding crucial programs—Illinois can cement its status as a national hub for food innovation and biomanufacturing. These efforts will ensure that the benefits of this emerging industry—job creation, new markets for crops, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and improved food resilience—are unlocked across the state in both rural and urban communities.

The recommendations reflect Illinois' long-term vision grounded in research, industry input, and a commitment to sustainable growth. Realizing this vision will require continued public-private collaboration, robust public investment, and a supportive policy ecosystem.

Appendix: Alternative Protein Innovation Task Force Board and Commission Details

From the Governor's Office of Executive Appointments

Contact:
Dakarai Howard (dakarai.howard@illinois.gov)

Function:
The Alternative Protein Innovation Task Force is established for the purposes of investigating and studying alternative proteins to identify and evaluate possible opportunities that the protein innovation and the alternative protein industry offer in the State. The Task Force shall study and draft a report on how the State may best support the growing alternative protein industry in the State. The Task Force shall: (i) examine the potential economic development benefits and job creation potential of the plant-based protein, cultivated meat, and fermented protein industries in the State; (ii) identify the environmental impacts of alternative proteins and their supply chains; (iii) examine if alternative proteins can strengthen the State's food resilience; (iv) assess how alternative proteins may affect individual health, public health, and food security in the State; and (v) identify ways the State may foster the growth of the emerging alternative protein industry, including by reviewing past and present efforts made to support the broader biotech and life science industries.

Senate Confirmation:
No

Compensation:
None

Composition:
The Alternative Protein Innovation Task Force shall consist of the following members: (1) one member of the Senate, who shall be appointed by the President of the Senate and shall serve as co-chair of the Task Force; (2) one member of the Senate, who shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate; (3) one member of the House of Representatives, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and shall serve as co-chair of the Task Force; (4) one member of the House of Representatives, who shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives; (5) the Secretary of Commerce and Economic Opportunity or the Secretary's designee; (6) the Director of Agriculture or the Director's designee; (7) 5 members who are appointed by the Director of Agriculture. Of the members appointed by the Director of Agriculture, 3 members shall be commercial producers of

agricultural commodities, of which one member shall be from the largest statewide agricultural association; and 2 members shall be representatives from the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences engaged in nutritional research; and (8) 6 members who are appointed by the Governor. Of the members appointed by the Governor, 2 members shall be engaged in academic or scientific research on alternative protein development at a State college or university; one member shall be a representative of a non-profit organization dedicated to the development and accessibility of alternative proteins; one member shall be a representative of the State's agricultural biotechnology industry; one member shall be the president of the Illinois Biotechnology Industry Organization or the organization's designee; and one member shall be a representative from a multinational food processing and manufacturing corporation headquartered in this State.

Chair:
Co-Chairs appointed by the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House

Authority:
Public Act 103-0543

Task Force Members:

Name	Appointed By	Position	Title
Bunting, Tasha	Director of Agriculture	Commercial producer of agricultural commodities	Member
Canty, Mary Beth	Speaker of the House of Representatives	Representative	Co-Chair
Conerty, Beth	Governor	Engaged in academic or scientific research on alternative protein development at a State college or university	Member
Conrad, John	Governor	President of the Illinois Biotechnology Industry Organization or the organization's designee	Member
Erdogan, Dr. Zeynep Madak	Director of Agriculture	Representative from the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences	Member
Fish, Allyson Amick	Governor	Representative from a multinational food processing and manufacturing corporation headquartered in this State	Member
Fritts, Rep. Brad	Minority Leader of the House	Representative	Member

Gonzalez Flores, Luzmaria Elvira	Governor	Engaged in academic or scientific research on alternative protein development at a State college or university	Member
Grupe, Travis	Statute	Director of Commerce and Economic Opportunity or the Secretary's designee	Member
Helfrich, Dr. William	Director of Agriculture	Representative from the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences	Member
Hunter, Sen. Mattie	President of the Senate	Senator	Co-Chair
Lewis, Sen. Seth	Minority Leader of the Senate	Senator	Member
Pattison, John	Governor	Representative of the State's agricultural biotechnology industry	Member
Sambursky, Jackie	Statute	Director of Agriculture or the Director's designee	Member
Sheyman, Ilya	Governor	Representative of a nonprofit organization dedicated to the development and accessibility of alternative proteins	Member
St. Peters, Josh	Director of Agriculture	Commercial producer of agricultural commodities	Member
Tirey, Jennifer	Director of Agriculture	Commercial producer of agricultural commodities	Member