



The Alt Protein Project

Aston University sample Alt Protein Project application

This application from students at Aston University is just one example of what a successful application for the Alt Protein Project looks like. We know (and appreciate) that every university ecosystem looks different and are eager to welcome universities and students with diverse backgrounds and strengths. Below is an example of an application from a university that had a strong, existing alternative protein research community. Visit our other example application, from the University of Chicago, for an example of a successful application from an ecosystem without existing alternative protein opportunities.

NOTE: This example does not include questions from our application that contain personal information. The 2025 application also contains a new question (RE: different student communities you would connect with) that is not included in this 2024 example.

Does an alternative protein-focused student group already exist?

- Yes

What is your student group's name and mission?

- I founded Agricell Society (established in September 2023) along with some like-minded students to promote the cellular agriculture concept and scientific advancements and innovations in the field. There was a strong desire to create a formal student society heavily backed by academic staff and interest, on the model of the previously established Cellular Agriculture society at UCL (which then went on to join the GFI alt protein project). This would be an opportunity to engage with students informally, through social events, academic lecturers, and industry visits.

Ultimately the goal was to build student engagement in the research conducted at Aston University on cultivated meat, create a lasting network of students and alumni, and enable students to do academic projects in cultivated meat creating collaboration across departments, and facilitate employment in the alternative protein sector by building relationships with academia, policy and industry leaders.

How many active members do you have?

- 10



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Is your group a formal university organization?

- Yes

Tell us about some of your group's accomplishments in relation to the mission of the Alt Protein Project.

- As a new society, and one of its kind at Aston University, we faced several challenges in advertising the society ahead of the new academic year, however, combining our efforts we were able to make a mark at Fresher's week, engaging with students who demonstrated a lot of interest in the field and the society.

We led several social events to build our student community and organised an academic talk from Dr Eirini Theodosiou and Dr Jason Thomas: "Have your cow and eat it!"

We now have an end of year visit to a cultivated meat company (Hoxton Farms) in the works.

Since Agricell society's inception, one member has already started a master's research project in cultivated meat, and another is set to do a summer research project in the field.

Why are you seeking to become an official group of the Alt Protein Project?

- We are seeking to become an official chapter of the Alt Protein Project primarily to extend our reach and impact at the university. Being part of the GFI family, would give the society more weight when dealing with external stakeholders. We would also be able to collaborate with other Alt Protein Project chapters across the UK, participating in conferences and creating a larger network of like-minded students. Secondly, it would be an opportunity to cover more alternative protein areas broadening our current focus.

While we have put in a lot of effort into developing our brand (mostly in designing our logo) we appreciate that the GFI symbol and mission is readily recognised and understood. Which would make the society look more professional and able to deliver its goals.

Why do you want to lead a group of the APP?



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- Aston University was a pioneer in the UK and remains one of the leaders in the cultivated meat field, yet many of the students remain unaware or unengaged with the subject. A student-led GFI chapter would be an invaluable opportunity to inform students and staff about the benefits of alternative proteins in an accessible way, bring students of diverse backgrounds and understandings of the concept together, and engage them academically. It would also be a chance to expand the talent pool by developing cross-disciplinary open-access research projects, empowering student entrepreneurs to propel the industry forward and driving collaborations across the Midlands and beyond.

In 2023, I created the AgriCell Society dedicated to advocating for alternative proteins through academic lectures, industry visits and social events. I believe that becoming an Alternative Protein Project chapter would significantly widen reach and increase impact, building upon the success of our pilot AgriCell Society.

What makes your university a good fit for the Alt Protein Project?

- Nestled in Birmingham, Aston University boasts a strategic advantage at the heart of the UK's vibrant industrial hub. The city is unique in its high concentration of Michelin-starred restaurants and renowned food industry players like Cadbury, making it an ideal location for advancing alternative protein initiatives nationwide. Despite its size, Aston provides a multidisciplinary environment, with active research in tissue engineering, stem cells, bioprocess engineering and behavioural studies on dietary habits.

Faculty members across departments have demonstrated a keen interest in alt proteins, culminating in a recent collaborative effort to join a consortium alongside Nottingham and Oxford universities, aimed at securing funding from UKRI for alt protein research. Opportunities also exist to integrate modules into current degree programmes, with lecturers already initiating student research projects centred on alternative proteins. Moreover, Aston's dedication to empowering students through consistent feedback channels further promotes a dynamic environment for driving positive change.

Are you aware of any existing alternative protein researchers or initiatives at your university? If so, please describe them below.



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- Aston University takes a cross-disciplinary approach to alternative proteins, involving staff members and students from three colleges. Dr. Eirini Theodosiou leads our diverse team, overseeing various PhD projects in cultivated meat and fostering collaboration between research groups. Our research spans a range of novel food topics, from Dr. Jason Thomas' studies on eating behaviour to Dr. Jean-Baptiste Souppiez's work on bioreactor flow dynamics and mechanical testing.
- The recent inclusion of Aston University in the bid for funding from the Alternative Proteins Innovation and Knowledge Centre demonstrates our determination to advance this field. Furthermore, other lecturers have expressed interest, and with potential support from GFI, we anticipate creating valuable opportunities for research, training, funding and partnerships to encourage more faculty members to explore novel food and alternative protein research.

Describe your level of familiarity with alternative proteins

- After watching sci-fi films as a teenager, I became fascinated with the idea of creating meat without animals; I was keen to reverse the vilified portrayal of novel foods in pop culture. Later, while learning about regenerative medicine, I wondered why meat was not produced using tissue engineering. Mark Post's announcement of the first cultivated burger solidified my commitment to pursuing a PhD in cultivated meat.

My co-founder's interest was piqued after turning vegan in 2015. Her job at a food waste organisation strengthened her resolve to improve food systems and advocate for sustainable proteins. Since then, she's been actively engaged as an alternative protein writer and researcher, cultivating strong networks, and writing several valuable resources.

Both of us stay informed through scientific literature and industry news. We also network via LinkedIn and regularly attend and present at conferences and webinars, including CAUK, GFI, MEVO, Cultivate UK and BESIG.

What excites you most about the alternative protein space?

- I am a meat eater. For me, meat is not just a source of protein, it is a hearty food, full of tradition with a rich and unmistakable flavour. However, I cannot ignore the scale of animal suffering incurred to produce these products. What excites me most about the alternative protein space is the scientific drive to replicate meat products that



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mimic their sensory properties, be it through plant-based, precision fermentation or cultivated foods. I started my PhD in cultivated meats to offer a sustainable alternative to the extremely damaging and growing intensive farming system.

As a vegan, my co-founder is also motivated by the ethical benefits alternative proteins have the potential to bring. But, as a microbiologist, she is also excited by the use of microbes, such as fungi and bacteria, to experiment with new flavours, textures and culinary experiences

Describe the experience you and your co-organizers have that prepare you to build a vibrant and long-lasting community of students and researchers around alternative proteins.

- I'm president of two student organisations, including AgriCell, where I've navigated the challenges of founding a new society, encouraging student engagement and fostering productive relationships with the Students' Union. I've led student projects throughout my PhD and championed the alternative protein field at conferences. Previously, at the UK Government Office for Science, I led communications for the Science and Engineering Profession network, organising large-scale events (>10000 people) and managing a blog. As a former teacher, I've developed skills in creatively engaging students aged 15-18 in diverse topics, in-person and online. My co-founder possesses invaluable community-building and leadership skills, having played an integral role in scaling a zero-waste nonprofit from its inception to a globally recognised community hub. This involved training, motivating and supervising 60+ volunteers to address challenges and drive food system change. Additionally, she founded and actively manages a community of vegan changemakers through her website www.vegansisters.org

How much time per week can you and your co-organizers each devote to organizing a student group for the next year?

- We're dedicated to ensuring the success of the group and have allocated approximately 8 hours per week each to devote to its activities. Additionally, we have the support of several other students across various degree levels, who can contribute time sporadically as needed.