



Brussels, the 9th of April 2020

## **Contribution: Commitment of the European insect sector towards more resilient and sustainable food supply systems**

The well-functioning of our food supply systems is essential to ensure food security for affected populations around the globe during times of crisis. Alike for many other food sectors, the COVID-19 pandemic poses numerous challenges to insect producers in Europe and around the globe. Exclusively composed of SMEs and ‘newly established’ businesses, **the insect sector is, indeed, facing important disruptions as a consequence of this unprecedented crisis.** The 64 members of IPIFF, as well as other non-affiliated entities active in insect production activities<sup>1</sup>, have noted the negative consequences of:

- strict **confinement measures** applied by national authorities, which are putting at risk the continuation of production activities in certain companies (i.e. teams active in operational activities are reduced to minimum), notably in the case of operators active in farming activities<sup>2</sup>;
- **heavily disrupted supply chains** generated by a shortage of feeding ingredients or equipment on the supply side, and with disruptions on the retail’s side (e.g. insect food operators) at the end of the chain;
- visible inconveniences that, in several instances, hindered the efforts of operators in assembling **new production facilities** and in **upscaling** their activities;
- **delays in the running of their technology development** plans (e.g. R&D projects at a standstill, R&D laboratories are temporarily closed);
- the postponement of private **investment** financing and public **funding** initiatives towards the development of the sector (notably as these funds are being reallocated to ‘other priorities’ in these times of crisis).

Alike other food sectors, insect production contributes to improving access to quality food and feed. From animal rearing activities, up to final processing stages, insect producers develop innovative and highly nutritious products to consumers, feed manufactures and/or livestock farmers. It is therefore of **utmost importance that insect production is classified as an ‘essential activity’** by national public authorities, so operators can **maintain their production activities** and contribute to ensuring a **free flow of animal feed<sup>3</sup> or food products** across borders.

<sup>1</sup> The IPIFF Secretariat collected input from non-IPIFF affiliated insect business operators. These entities expressed their concern regarding the possible negative impact of the pandemic on the insect sector and called for immediate action on this matter. Their feedback was also included in this Contribution.

<sup>2</sup> Several companies voluntarily decided to decimate their insect colony with the view to reduce the presence of staff members who are often needed in operational activities.

<sup>3</sup> Together with 41 associations active in the European Feed supply chain, IPIFF sent a letter (17 March 2020) to the EU Commissioners for Health and Food Safety and Agriculture in order to recognise feed as ‘essential products’ whose free circulation in the EU should be ensured.

Furthermore, the current crisis highlighted the fragile nature of our food and feed supply chains, and the need to explore ‘new solutions’ to address these problems. Food security challenges are often central in times of (sanitary) crisis and will become even more prominent as the global population continues to rise steadily. In that context, we cannot afford to ignore the need to accelerate the development of innovative and sustainable production models, which would co-exist with/ come in support of existing food production systems, and thereby contribute to improving overall resilience and reducing the pressure on our limited natural resources.

In our view, the development of new protein sources, such as insects, is part of the solution in the transition towards more **resilient and sustainable food production systems**.

- ✦ Along with plant protein crops which are currently ‘under cultivated’ in Europe (e.g. soy, pulses) and other innovative materials (e.g. algae, fermentation products), insect production would underpin national and/or regional **strategies to boost the development of locally produced proteins - elements of particular relevance** in the context of EU’s deficiency in high protein products;
- ✦ Insect production is based on **circular principles** and contributes to **revitalising rural areas by connecting agri-food supply chains** (underexploited by-products from the agri-food industries are upcycled through insect animals and converted into high protein products available to farmers and feed and food manufacturers);
- ✦ Finally, boosting resilience on farm level could be done with the support of innovative farming techniques. Insect production, for example, offers many opportunities for ‘**traditional**’ farmers to **diversify their production activities** and secure additional sources of income, thereby making them less exposed to an ‘unstable’ economic environment.

The European insect sector, although a young industry, intends to **contribute proactively towards the transformation of our food supply chains** into more **sustainable** and **circular** systems. Against this background and in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, IPIFF wishes to make **the following recommendations to European and National Competent Authorities**.

- ✦ We **urge the European Commission to publish the ‘Farm to Fork’ Strategy (F2F)** in accordance with the latest agreed time frame (publication on the 29th of April 2020). We firmly believe that EU discussions on the development of more resilient and sustainable food systems must by no means be delayed. Notably, the directions offered by the much-awaited ‘Farm to Fork’ Communication could be very helpful in identifying preliminary priorities on how to best respond to food security challenges resulting from major crises, such as pandemic events;
- ✦ Similarly, **key EU policy reforms for the development of our sector** (e.g. novel food authorisations for insects as food, authorisation of insect proteins in poultry and pig feed) should not be delayed either. Notably, these reforms are necessary to unleash the potential of our sector, and thereby bring forward several important solutions envisioned in the F2F ambition towards shorter and more sustainable food supply chains;
- ✦ Finally, we are asking national competent authorities to ensure that **insect producers can get full access to national support mechanisms** that are open to economic actors active in the food and feed sector (e.g. direct financial support and/or other aid open to food and/or feed sectors - including at fiscal or social level).