Experts debate pros and cons of plant meat

HYDERABAD: While sales of plant-based meat and dairy products are on the rise in the west, touching $3.1 billion a year, scientists and entrepreneurs on Friday debated its potential at India’s first summit ‘Future of Protein’ organised by Humane Society International (India) at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology here.

Though some researchers and startups claimed it tastes similar to meat, is healthier as it avoids use of antibiotics and would reduce carbon footprint, few scientists raised concerns about it lacking in certain crucial amino acids, iron and Vitamin-D. National Institute of Nutrition’s former director Dr B Sesikiran said digestibility of plant-based beef is an also an issue when compared with animal meat. “Legumes lack essential amino acids like Methionine. Iron and Vitamin-D deficiency will be an issue for foods derived from plant sources,” he said.

Defending plant-based meat and dairy products, Good Food Institute MD Varun Deshpande, said: “The traditional meat production model is affecting climate change because of which more calories are needed to produce animal meat,” he said.

Dr Rajeev Varshney, Research Program Director, Genetic Gains Lab at ICRISAT, said, “Eating plant-based meat will reduce chronic diseases. We have to increase pulses production to meet the demand. We have identified 25 genetic lines of pulses that have more than 30% protein. Using these lines will increase the pulses production by 3.2 million tonnes per year.”