‘Upside’ and ‘Goodmeat’: Two cell-cultured chicken companies take different paths in long road to consumer acceptance

No one knows yet what approach to cell-cultivated meat will ultimately resonate with consumers, which probably explains why Upside and Good Meat are pursuing different paths.

Good Meat wants to focus on products that contain more animal cells than plant-based filler. As [Nate Park, director of product development at Eat Just] explained in his Alameda kitchen, the experience of eating cell-cultivated chicken crosses an invisible line once the product contains at least 50 percent animal cells. Your palate starts to recognize the product as chicken, he says. “Once you hit 60 or 70 percent, it becomes chicken,” Park added. “It starts to hit that point of, like, ‘Okay, the experience now makes sense to me.’”

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Yet, over at the demonstration kitchen at Upside’s Engineering, Production, and Innovation Center, or EPIC for short, founder Uma Valeti and his teams are developing products in which the chicken cell count drops below the 50 percent mark.

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Whether Upside, Good Meat and other companies can fix the problems of industrial animal agriculture is an open question. For years, the cultivated-meat industry has been an object of great hope — and substantial doubt. It’s a tension that has played out between company executives who promise that the era of guilt-free meat is just around the corner and critics who say that the industry will never compete with large-scale animal agriculture.

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