

FROM DEFENSE TO LEADERSHIP: THE FUTURE OF ANIMAL PROTEINS IN THE AGE OF PROTEIN COEXISTENCE





From Defense to Leadership: The Future of Animal Proteins in the Age of Protein Coexistence

Pietro Paganini, President of Competere.eu, spoke at the 2026 Annual Assembly of ASSICA (the Italian Meat and Cured Meats Industry Association), held in Rome on June 18. During the conference, titled *"The Future of Pork in an Age of Global Uncertainty"*, Paganini highlighted how the pork and cured meats sector is now facing a transformation that goes far beyond food competition itself.

Geopolitical instability, new trade barriers, declining public trust, polarized public debate, and the AI revolution are reshaping how citizens, businesses, and institutions perceive food, health, and sustainability. In this new environment, animal proteins increasingly risk being reduced to symbols within simplified, emotional narratives that are often disconnected from facts and data.

According to Paganini, the response cannot be purely defensive. What is needed is a more strategic vision, one capable of rebuilding trust, strengthening the economic, nutritional, and cultural value of the supply chain, and creating a new narrative based on innovation, transparency, responsibility, and freedom of choice.

"The challenge is not choosing between animal and alternative proteins, but building a model of protein coexistence able to integrate sustainability, technology, and dietary plurality", Paganini affirmed, emphasizing how AI, data, and emerging technologies are already reshaping the future of the sector.

The Future of Proteins Is Coexistence — Policy Highlights

Covid, wars, protectionism, artificial intelligence, and a growing crisis of trust have reshaped the competitive landscape. For the pork and cured meats sector, the challenge is no longer simply to withstand pressure, but to lead a new era of value creation, innovation, and protein coexistence.

This new competitive environment highlights several strategic priorities for the future of the supply chain:

- The pork and cured meats industry should not be viewed merely as a food category, but as a strategic infrastructure of Italy's agri-food Made in Italy system.
- Today, supply chains compete not only on products and prices, but also on perception, reputation, and the ability to communicate value.
- Animal proteins increasingly risk being turned into symbols within simplified narratives around health, climate, sustainability, and animal welfare. The answer cannot be defensive identity politics, but a broader vision based on protein coexistence.
- Sustainability must become measurable performance, not a slogan. Environmental impact, animal welfare, traceability, regulation, energy, logistics, and nutrition must be addressed through data, innovation, and responsibility.
- The future of the sector depends on moving from defense to leadership: building trust, making value visible, strengthening innovation, and contributing to Italian and European food security.



1. Don't Explain the Industry to Those Who Already Know It. Explain the Time It Operates In.

There is no need to explain pork and cured meats to those who work in the sector. Companies across this supply chain already understand the complexity behind every product: quality, food safety, processing, logistics, exports, investment, reputation, and consumer relationships.

The real challenge today is different: understanding how to compete in a world that is changing faster than supply chains themselves. Businesses no longer compete only in markets, but within an ecosystem shaped by geopolitical instability, new regulations, reputational pressure, cost volatility, and increasingly emotional public narratives.

Today, competition is also about perceptions, simplifications, and judgments that often travel faster than data. This is where strategy, technology, AI, and the ability to interpret the broader context become decisive competitive advantages.

Animal proteins have played a crucial role in human evolution. For early humans, access to nutrient-dense foods contributed significantly to brain development, cognitive growth, social organization, and the ability to adapt to different environments. In other words, food did not simply nourish the body, it helped build human intelligence itself.

And even today, as the global population moves toward 10 billion people, animal proteins remain an essential component of any serious strategy for food security and balanced, accessible, and nutritious diets. Not because they must exclude alternative protein sources, but because they contribute, alongside them, to complete, diverse nutrition adapted to different ages, cultures, territories, and living conditions.

In this sense, the future of pork and cured meats is not only about one industry. It is about the future of Italy's agri-food Made in Italy system, the country's ability to export value, the resilience of local territories, citizens' freedom of choice, and the way Europe chooses to manage the relationship between food, health, sustainability, and innovation.

The question, therefore, is not simply: how do we defend a sector under pressure?

The more ambitious question is: how can this sector become a stronger, more credible, and more influential voice, capable of leading the public debate in an age of global uncertainty?

2. The Great Paradox of Our Time: More Possibilities, Less Trust

We live in an age defined by a difficult paradox. On one side, humanity has never had more knowledge, more technology, greater productive capacity, better healthcare, broader access to information, or more freedom of choice. On the other hand, societies are experiencing a growing sense of fragility: less trust in institutions, less trust in science, less trust in businesses, less trust in media, and less trust in the future itself.

This gap between reality and perception is one of the defining challenges of our time. It is not

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only political. It shapes markets, consumption patterns, business environments, communities, and the way citizens interpret the world around them.

People do not make decisions based only on data. They choose within emotional environments shaped by fear, expectations, identity, distrust, narratives, images, and social signals. Often, decisions are made emotionally first — and rationalized afterward.

This dynamic applies to food more than almost anything else.

Food is never neutral. It is health, identity, family, territory, pleasure, memory, culture, responsibility, and emotion. And when public debate becomes more anxious and polarized, food is pulled into the same dynamic. Products are no longer judged only for their quality, nutritional role, or the complexity of the supply chain behind them. They become symbols.

This is how animal proteins, including pork and cured meats, risk being reduced to emotional shortcuts: health versus pleasure, sustainability versus production, innovation versus tradition, animals versus humans, future versus past. These are simple narratives. Powerful narratives. Easy narratives. And precisely for that reason, they are dangerous.

Because they simplify what should be understood, polarize what should be debated, and increasingly push public policy to respond to perception before reality.

This is why the challenge facing the sector is no longer only economic, regulatory, or commercial. It is also cognitive and cultural.

Before defending a product, the industry must rebuild the environment in which that product is perceived, interpreted, trusted, and ultimately chosen.

3. Three Shocks Reshaped the Competitive Landscape

To understand why the pork and cured meats sector, like much of the global agri-food industry, now operates in such a delicate environment, we must look beyond food itself. What has changed in recent years is not only the market. The deeper transformation concerns how citizens, consumers, businesses, and institutions perceive risk, security, trust, and the future. Three major shocks, in particular, have reshaped the competitive landscape.

The first was Covid. It was not simply a health crisis. It was a social, economic, and psychological rupture. It disrupted physical relationships, consumption habits, education, work, restaurants, logistics, and global trade. It exposed the fragility of supply chains and brought the concept of security back to the center of public attention: health security, production security, food security, and supply security. Economies reopened. Trust did not fully recover. And without trust, the relationship between citizens, businesses, and institutions becomes inherently more fragile.

The second shock is geopolitical instability. Wars, energy crises, trade tensions, protectionism, fragmented markets, strategic competition between blocs, and new regulatory barriers have ended the illusion of a linear, stable, and predictable globalization. Supply chains no longer compete only on product quality. They compete within a system shaped by energy, logistics, raw materials, certifications, standards, tariffs, non-tariff barriers, political instability, and strategic

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dependencies. For a sector deeply connected to exports and strongly tied to the value of Made in Italy, this is not an abstract geopolitical scenario. It directly affects market access, margins, investment capacity, reputation, and national competitiveness.

The third shock concerns information itself. Social media, artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and cognitive bubbles have transformed the way public opinion is formed, and more fundamentally, the way people learn, interpret reality, and make decisions. People no longer live only within a shared reality. They live inside continuous flows of images, alerts, emotions, micro-narratives, algorithmic feeds, and increasingly fragmented information communities. Two citizens can live in the same city, shop in the same supermarket, consume the same products, and still hold completely different views about health, sustainability, farming, food production, and the future of agriculture. Not necessarily because one is more informed than the other, but because they inhabit different cognitive ecosystems.

The relationship with knowledge itself is also changing. Increasingly, people no longer begin from what they know, but from what they search in real time. Search engines, social networks, chatbots, and AI systems are often consulted before personal judgment is formed. This dramatically expands access to information. But without critical thinking, it also increases exposure to simplifications, emotional manipulation, distorted content, and narratives designed more to capture attention than to generate understanding.

Unlike previous historical transitions, agricultural, industrial, service-based, or digital, today's transformation is not only changing what we produce or how we communicate. It is changing how reality itself is constructed. The boundary between direct experience, information, perception, and narrative is becoming weaker. And when that boundary weakens, it becomes easier to turn complex issues into simple symbols, and simple symbols into political, moral, or regulatory battles.

The result is a more exposed, emotional, and uncertain citizen-consumer. And often, a political system that responds to that uncertainty with simplistic answers to complex problems. This is where many regulatory shortcuts emerge: bans, punitive taxes, alarm-based labels, rigid classifications, standardized targets, and demonization campaigns. Tools that may create the impression of fast action, but often fail to address the deeper causes of the problems they claim to solve.

This is the new competitive environment for the sector: not only markets, but perception; not only regulation, but narratives; not only production, but trust; not only exports, but reputation; not only measurable sustainability, but the ability to explain what sustainability truly means inside a complex supply chain.

4. Why Animal Proteins Are Becoming a Symbolic Battleground

In this new context, animal proteins are no longer judged only for what they are: food products, supply chains, businesses, jobs, territories, culture, and nutrition. Increasingly, they are turned

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into symbols. And when a sector becomes a symbol, it is no longer understood in its complexity. Meat becomes a climate symbol. Cured meats become a health symbol. Farming becomes an ethical symbol. Food traditions are sometimes associated with the past. Innovation is presented as a replacement. Sustainability is reduced to environmental footprint alone, often measured only partially. Public health is simplified into lists of foods to promote or discourage.

This is a dangerous dynamic because it creates artificial oppositions: health versus pleasure, sustainability versus production, innovation versus tradition, plant proteins versus animal proteins, future versus identity. These are effective communication formulas, but culturally weak and politically risky. They help polarization, not understanding.

In this climate, it would be a mistake to think that demonization is acceptable when it concerns other foods, other supply chains, or other production models. Victories achieved by delegitimizing others do not last long. Sooner or later, they become a boomerang. The war against processed foods does not automatically strengthen traditional products. The war against meat does not truly strengthen plant proteins, nor the opposite. Demonizing sugar, fats, or individual nutrients does not create a stronger culture of balanced nutrition.

On the contrary, this fragmentation produces a kind of “parochialization” of the food debate: every sector tries to protect itself by blaming another; every supply chain defends its own space by limiting the space of others; every food product is pushed to present itself as the morally superior alternative. The result is a weaker, more divided, and more exposed system. While the food world becomes more fragmented, other sectors, more cohesive, technological, and financially stronger, occupy the space left by the lack of a shared vision.

The lesson is clear: no supply chain can secure its future by building its reputation on the delegitimization of others. The future of food does not need new food wars. It needs a more mature framework based on balance, evidence, responsibility, plurality, and coexistence.

The point is not to deny the challenges. The pork and cured meats sector must address real issues: environmental sustainability, animal welfare, health, transparency, traceability, competitiveness, nutritional quality, and communication responsibility. Minimizing these issues would be a mistake. But it would be equally wrong to address them through ideological categories, punitive tools, or regulatory shortcuts that turn complex foods into simple targets.

Good public policy should start from reality, not from a caricature of reality. It should distinguish between balanced consumption and excess, between quality and standardization, between responsible supply chains and incorrect practices, between measurable sustainability and emotional narratives. It should recognize that food is not simply a sum of isolated nutrients, nor a sum of emissions, nor a sum of restrictions. Food is a relationship between nutrition, culture, territory, economy, environment, freedom, and responsibility.

When this balance is lost, politics risks following the loudest perception instead of the strongest evidence. This is how taxes, bans, warning labels, advertising restrictions, simplistic classifications, and pressure campaigns emerge, promising quick solutions, but often producing limited results, market distortions, food anxiety, distrust, and less freedom of choice.

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For this reason, the issue of animal proteins is not only about one productive sector. It concerns the way we choose to govern the food transition: through knowledge or fear, through pluralism or exclusion, through innovation or ideological replacement, through individual responsibility or regulatory paternalism.

5. The Strategic Risk: Remaining on the Defensive

Facing this scenario, the first instinct of any sector under pressure is to defend itself. This is understandable. When attacks, hostile campaigns, media simplifications, and regulatory pressures increase, the natural reaction is to correct, deny, clarify, and respond point by point. But a strategy based only on defense risks becoming insufficient.

Those who only defend themselves end up accepting the terrain chosen by others. They accept the language, categories, and priorities defined by others. They end up saying only “we are not the problem,” while public debate increasingly asks who can be part of the solution.

The pork and cured meats sector must certainly defend its reputation when it is represented unfairly. It must correct misinformation, challenge simplifications, and respond with data, transparency, and scientific rigor. But it cannot stop there. Because what is at stake is not only the defense of a product or a category. It is the ability to be recognized as a strategic supply chain for Italy and for Europe.

This requires a change in posture. Not asking for corporative protection, but proposing public value. Not simply defending tradition, but showing how tradition can evolve into innovation. Not rejecting every criticism, but distinguishing between legitimate criticism and ideological attacks. Not closing itself within the boundaries of the sector, but engaging with science, institutions, consumers, media, schools, local communities, and other parts of the food system.

The decisive shift is cultural before it is communicative: moving beyond a siege mentality and adopting a leadership mindset.

The sector should not only say “we are not the past.” It should demonstrate how it can contribute to the future: food security, nutritional quality, employment, exports, innovation, traceability, measurable sustainability, food education, and freedom of choice.

In an age of uncertainty, the strongest supply chains will not be those that shout the loudest. They will be those capable of building trust, explaining complexity, recognizing challenges, and offering credible solutions.

For this reason, the strategic question is no longer only how to defend pork and cured meats from criticism. The real question is how to make them part of a broader vision for the future of food in Italy and in Europe.

6. Protein Coexistence: A New Framework for the Future of Food

If the challenge is to move beyond polarization, then we need a new framework. It is not

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enough to defend animal proteins. We must change the way we talk about proteins, nutrition, sustainability, and the future of food. The question cannot be which protein should win and which should lose. The more serious question is how to guarantee that different citizens, cultures, territories, and production systems have access to safe, nutritious, sustainable, affordable, and culturally recognizable sources of protein.

For this reason, I prefer to speak about protein coexistence. Not a war between animal and plant proteins. Not a protein transition understood as the ideological replacement of one food with another. Not a moral competition between past and future. Protein coexistence recognizes that the future of food is not built through exclusion, but through a better organization of plurality, balance, responsibility, and innovation.

Within this perspective, animal proteins continue to play an essential role. Not because they should occupy all the space, but because they are part of a complete, varied, and nutritionally adequate diet. They provide highly bioavailable nutrients, are rooted in deep food cultures, and support territories, skills, supply chains, employment, and exports. At the same time, they must continue to innovate, improve, measure performance, communicate transparently, and respond seriously to environmental, social, and health-related challenges.

Protein coexistence is not a convenient formula to avoid change. It is the opposite. It is a method for governing change without falling into simplification. It means recognizing that we need more solutions, not a single solution; more innovation, not more bans; more knowledge, not more fear; more responsibility, not more paternalism.

Italy can offer an original contribution to this vision. Our food culture is not based on exclusion, but on balance. The Mediterranean diet is not a rigid list of permitted and prohibited foods. It is a method based on variety, portion, frequency, seasonality, territory, conviviality, movement, and responsibility. It is a culture of moderation, not prohibition. A culture of value, not excess. A culture based on the relationship between food, people, and community, rather than reducing food to a nutritional or environmental algorithm.

Within this framework, pork and cured meats can be presented not as remnants of the past, but as part of a mature food system: products to be consumed in balance, valued for their quality, origin, and production expertise, and included within a varied diet and a responsible lifestyle. Not symbols to defend through identity politics, but foods to be understood within a broader principle of balance.

Protein coexistence is therefore also a political proposal. It says that freedom of choice is protected not by denying challenges, but by giving citizens better tools to understand them. It says that innovation does not require the cancellation of tradition. It says that sustainability cannot be measured through a single metric. It says that public health is not built by turning foods into enemies, but by helping people live better, choose better, and take greater responsibility.

In an age that tends to divide, protein coexistence can become the most mature response: not everyone against everyone else, but each actor within a broader balance. Not the supply chain against the consumer, not industry against health, not tradition against innovation. But a new

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pact between production, science, institutions, and citizens to build a freer, more balanced, and more conscious food future.

7. The Challenges Ahead: Trust, Value, and Innovation

If protein coexistence is the framework, then concrete actions are needed to make it credible. For the pork and cured meats sector, the challenge is not only to communicate better. It is to demonstrate that the supply chain is capable of addressing the major transformations shaping today's agri-food system: food security, sustainability, regulation, competitiveness, innovation, trust, and value.

The main challenges can be understood through several strategic priorities.

Food Security and Supply Chain Resilience

Pork and cured meats are not simply products. They are part of a food infrastructure that connects energy supply, water, land, farming, industrial processing, recycling and circularity, logistics, distribution, technology, local territories, exports, consumers, and institutions. In a world marked by wars, energy crises, trade tensions, and new barriers, the ability to produce, process, and distribute safe, high-quality food can no longer be taken for granted. It is a key element of both national and European resilience.

Environment, Climate, and Measurable Sustainability

The sector faces growing pressure regarding emissions, resource use, water, land, biodiversity, livestock management, circularity, and environmental impact. The response cannot be to deny these pressures. It must be to transform them into innovation, efficiency, measurement, and reputation. The key challenge is to avoid carbon tunnel vision: reducing sustainability to a single metric, however important, risks obscuring the complexity of supply chains. Sustainability also involves land use, protection of local territories, water management, biodiversity, energy, circularity, animal welfare, food security, and the ability to sustain rural and productive economies.

If sustainability remains a slogan, the supply chain will remain vulnerable to emotional narratives. If it becomes measurable, documented, and communicable performance, it can instead become a source of credibility, trust, and competitive advantage.

Animal Welfare and Production Responsibility

Animal welfare cannot be left only to emotional or ideological interpretations. It is a serious issue that involves farming quality, skills, investment, controls, innovation, transparency, and the relationship with consumers. Here too, the sector must avoid generic defensive reactions and choose the stronger path: demonstrating progress, standards, responsibility, and a continuous capacity for improvement.

Energy, Logistics, and Industrial Costs

CLike every complex supply chain, the pork and cured meats sector depends on energy, transportation, refrigeration, packaging, safety, quality, controls, skilled labor, and industrial capacity. Consumers see the final product. But behind that product there is a system with

high organizational, technological, and regulatory intensity. Every new expectation, greater sustainability, more traceability, higher safety standards, better quality, and greater accessibility, comes at a cost. The real question is who recognizes that cost, who supports it, and who explains it.

Stable Regulation and Regulatory Certainty

Companies can invest, innovate, measure performance, reduce impacts, improve processes, and strengthen animal welfare standards. But they need rules that are stable, proportionate, measurable, and technologically neutral. Regulatory uncertainty is a hidden cost: it slows investment, increases compliance burdens, reduces long-term planning capacity, and weakens competitiveness. Good public policy should not replace business. It should create the conditions that allow businesses to innovate.

Health, Nutrition, and a Culture of Balance

Pork and cured meats should be discussed within the context of an overall diet, not isolated from it. The point is not to promote excess, but to defend a culture of balance: variety, portion, frequency, quality, lifestyle, physical activity, and responsibility. A serious food policy does not turn food into a culprit. It helps people understand how to include it within a broader, more conscious, and sustainable dietary model over time.

Value, Price, and Accessibility

In a context of inflation and pressure on purchasing power, price matters. But when food is judged only by price, all the value embedded in the supply chain becomes invisible: raw material quality, safety, expertise, geographical indications, local territories, controls, sustainability, labor, exports, and reputation. Accessibility is important. But accessibility without recognition of value risks becoming a race to the bottom.

Exports, Markets, and Italy's Agri-Food Made in Italy

The pork and cured meats sector is part of Italy's productive identity. It is not only about domestic consumption. It is about processing, international reputation, export capacity, market presence, economic diplomacy, and recognized quality. In a more fragmented and protectionist world, Italy's agri-food Made in Italy system needs supply chains that are strong, credible, and capable of communicating not only the product itself, but also the system that makes that product possible.

Communication, Education, and Trust

Trust cannot be rebuilt through a single campaign. It is built through continuity, physical presence, dialogue, transparency, and expertise. This means engaging not only with consumers, but also with schools, doctors, nutritionists, media, institutions, the scientific community, and local territories. It means not communicating only when criticism or attacks emerge, but being present beforehand, when perceptions, questions, and doubts are first taking shape.

These challenges are interconnected. Without trust, value is not recognized. Without value, innovation is perceived only as a cost. Without innovation, tradition risks becoming nostalgia.

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Without stable rules, even the most responsible companies struggle to invest. Without a culture of balance, the debate around health and nutrition becomes dominated by fear, bans, and simplifications. This is the decisive shift: pork and cured meats must be understood not only as a food category, but as a system. A system that connects agriculture, industry, local territories, employment, culture, nutrition, exports, regulation, sustainability, and trust.

This is the real challenge of the coming years: moving from product to infrastructure, from supply chain to value platform, and from defensive communication to cultural leadership.

8. Pork and Cured Meats as a Strategic Food Infrastructure

The pork and cured meats sector should therefore not be viewed only as a category producing traditional foods, processed products, or Made in Italy specialties. It is increasingly part of a strategic food infrastructure. It connects farming, land, water, energy, technology, industrial processing, expertise, nutrition, logistics, distribution, international trade, local territories, consumers, and institutions. It connects rural areas and urban markets, food culture and industrial capacity, local production and global competition, agriculture and public health, territorial identity and exports. For this reason, pork and cured meats matter beyond the sector itself.

In recent years, Europe has learned to speak the language of energy security. It has rediscovered the importance of defense security. It is investing greater attention in technological security, semiconductors, critical raw materials, pharmaceutical supply chains, and industrial capacity. Yet food security is still too often treated as an emergency issue: discussed only when there is a war, a drought, a logistics crisis, a supply disruption, or a price shock. This is no longer sufficient. If Europe wants to be serious about strategic autonomy, long-term competitiveness, and economic resilience, food security must become part of that conversation. And animal protein supply chains are part of it.

A resilient pork and cured meats supply chain means much more than product availability on supermarket shelves. It means responsible farming, processing capacity, skilled labor, technology, health standards, safety, traceability, productive territories, access to nutritious food, reliable trade relations, exports, international reputation, and consumer trust.

It also means the ability to produce, process, and distribute food in a world marked by geopolitical instability, climate pressure, regulatory uncertainty, market volatility, new trade barriers, and increasing polarization in public debate. This does not mean nostalgia. It does not mean protectionism. It does not mean defensive communication. It means recognizing the strategic value of a supply chain positioned at the intersection of agriculture, industry, nutrition, trade, culture, local territories, and public policy.

The future of the sector should therefore be framed around five words: resilience, innovation, competitiveness, trust, and value. Italy and Europe should not treat pork and cured meats as a fragile tradition to protect from change. They should treat them as a strategic food infrastructure to modernize, strengthen, and make visible.

Today, we increasingly recognize the strategic importance of large technology platforms. We consider them infrastructures of knowledge, data, connectivity, defense, space, and industrial capability. They shape competitiveness, security, and the autonomy of modern societies. But societies do not live only on data, algorithms, satellites, and artificial intelligence. They also depend on the ability to feed their citizens.

If technological platforms are infrastructures of knowledge, mature, organized, and resilient food supply chains are infrastructures of food security. They do not produce only consumer goods. They produce availability, continuity, quality, trust, territorial cohesion, employment, exports, and the capacity to respond during crises.

Policy Messages

- 1. Food security must become a permanent part of the European debate on strategic autonomy.** Europe has learned to speak the language of energy security, defense, technology, semiconductors, critical raw materials, and pharmaceutical supply chains. It must now recognize food security as another pillar of its resilience.
- 2. Animal proteins are part of a balanced food security strategy.** Pork and cured meats, within a dietary model based on variety, portion, frequency, and quality, contribute to nutrition, employment, local territories, exports, productive culture, and crisis response capacity.
- 3. Sustainability must become measurable performance, not ideological narrative.** Environment, climate, water, land, biodiversity, circularity, and animal welfare must be addressed through data, innovation, investment, and proportionate regulation, avoiding simplifications and carbon tunnel vision.
- 4. Public policy should enable innovation, not replace business.** Companies can invest, measure performance, reduce impacts, and improve processes, but they need stable, technologically neutral, proportionate, and predictable rules.
- 5. The future of food requires protein coexistence, not protein wars.** Food security cannot be built by opposing animal and plant proteins, tradition and innovation, or health and pleasure. It is built through plurality, balance, responsibility, freedom of choice, and knowledge.
- 6. The value of the supply chain must be recognized, not only demanded.** Consumers and regulators ask for greater sustainability, traceability, safety, quality, and accessibility. Every expectation comes with a cost. If value is not recognized, the supply chain weakens and price becomes the only visible signal.
- 7. The sector must move from defensive communication to strategic leadership.** The challenge is not only to respond to criticism, but to lead a new public conversation about food security, nutritional balance, measurable sustainability, innovation, and Italy's agri-food Made in Italy system.

Conclusion: From Defense to Leadership

The future of pork and cured meats will not be determined only by markets, regulations, or trade agreements. It will depend on the ability of this sector to be recognized for what it truly is: a productive, cultural, and strategic supply chain within Italy's agri-food Made in Italy system.

In a time of global uncertainty, the instinct is often to close inwards: to defend one's space, respond to attacks, and protect the past. But this is no longer enough. Mature supply chains cannot simply survive transformation. They must help lead it.

Leading means recognizing challenges without being overwhelmed by them. It means addressing environment, health, animal welfare, regulation, innovation, and trust not as external threats, but as part of a new model of competitiveness. It means demonstrating that tradition and innovation are not opposites. Tradition survives when it stops being nostalgia and becomes the ability to adapt.

For this reason, protein coexistence is not a slogan. It is a cultural and political proposal. It says that the future of food cannot be built by excluding foods, demonizing supply chains, or imposing a single narrative. It must be built through balance, plurality, knowledge, responsibility, and freedom of choice.

This is the path Italy can offer: not a war between proteins, not a politics of prohibition, not a version of sustainability reduced to caricature, but a food model based on quality, moderation, territory, innovation, and trust.

Ultimately, the question is not whether this sector still has a future. The real question is what kind of future it wants to help build. It can remain trapped in a defensive posture. Or it can adopt a new one: more open, more scientific, more European, and more aware of its own value. From defense to leadership. This is the challenge. And it is also the opportunity.