CitizenCentral S2 CH4 final transcripts

Speaker 1 [00:00:11] That Europe finds itself at the front of the storm is not something new.

Speaker 2 [00:00:15] The world of tomorrow will be a different place.

Speaker 3 [00:00:17] It's good that Europe is ambitious in climate policy. We should be ambitious but also realistic.

Speaker 4 [00:00:23] The task is to learn to live within the boundaries Mother Earth has given us.

Speaker 5 [00:00:26] Only united we can defend our values, we can protect the interests of all citizens.

Manex [00:00:40] Hello there and welcome to CitizenCentral, the podcast series about the first transnational democracy instrument in the world, the European Citizens Initiative. The ECI gives people the chance to pitch their own EU policies to the European Commission by gathering one million signatures from seven EU states. My name is Manex Rekarte Cowie, and on CitizenCentral I'll be finding out how the ECI works, how you can launch or support an initiative, and what drives people to give up their time and energy for a cause they care deeply about. In today's chapter, we will bring the second season of CitizenCentral to an end. But we will do it with a bang. We will kick off in Milan, meeting Filippo Borsellino, who with his ECI “End the Slaughter Age” is asking the Commission to defer European livestock agriculture subsidies to cultured meat alternatives in order to protect the environment while providing the society with a healthy protein source without harming animals. Then we will head over to Brussels, where we will meet Elise Fleury, a campaigner for animal rights, who with her ECI “Fur Free Europe” is asking the Commission to ban fur farming and trading in the EU. Open any IPCC report, and it is clear that our diet, our animal-sourced protein is impacting the climate. Europe is a big meat-producing region, and Europeans are some of the heavier meat consumers in the world. So, let's head over now to Milan to meet our first guest of this chapter of CitizenCentral. Filippo Borsellino, thanks for joining us on CitizenCentral, and please tell our listeners who you are and what you do.

Filippo [00:02:49] Okay, hello to everyone. Thank you all to have me here. I am a vegan activist, and I work as a political communicator here in Italy. I became vegan when I was, like, 25. And now I'm meeting guys and girls that are just maybe 17, 18 or 19 that are already vegan. So, for me, it's a really good thing to see.

Manex [00:03:11] Filippo, veganism is really picking up in recent years, but the reasons for this veganism often vary, especially when speaking to younger vegan citizens. So, how did you become a vegan?

Filippo [00:03:25] Yeah, for sure, I mean, it depends. Now, maybe most people are becoming vegan because of the environment. They care about the planet. They know that the meat industry is destroying the world. So, maybe this is the first step that makes people come to the vegan world. For me, I used to love meat, and I used to hate vegans. I
really hated vegans. But I became one of them because now I care about the animals. I know what they're living every day, so I just can't close my eyes. That's my point.

Manex [00:04:03] It sounds like quite a change in your own life. So, what are you asking the Commission for with your ECI “End the Slaughter Age”?

Filippo [00:04:11] We want to move the money of our tax from animal farming to the vegetable farms and the agriculture of cells. I mean, products like clean meat or clean milk. And these kinds of products are so much better than the traditional ones because they don't have any kind of antibiotics. They don't have a heavy impact on the planet. So, it's a win-win situation; this kind of initiative, it's like a compromise to our world, to the vegan world, or with the omnivore world. Let's create a product system that does not harm animals, does not harm planets, and especially does not harm people.

Manex [00:05:00] This is probably a big relief for our listeners. You are not asking Europe to go vegan, but for the support to cultured meat and agricultural innovation to be multiplied. But how exactly is this meat created, Filippo?

Filippo [00:05:13] You just take some cells from the animals; you put the cell in this bioreactor, you feed it with some vegetables, a vegetable soup, until you create the muscle that is consumed on the table. And this is really nice because you have 90% less CO2 emissions. So, you use 95% of water less, and you don't use land.

Manex [00:05:40] Filippo, some people might say this is anti-natural.

Filippo [00:05:45] Now we are talking through a laptop; it's something natural. It's just an evolution of our way to communicate. The same thing with food. We're just having an evolution of our way to eat. We used to live in a cave, now we're living in the house. So, it's just an evolution of us. I think that clean meat is our way to grow up as a species.

Manex [00:06:09] Okay. Very well argumented. But would this not make meat really expensive?

Filippo [00:06:15] No, not really. Actually, it always depends on the production. More of this product is going to be produced. Okay. Then they will spend less. Okay. And I think that it is wrong using our money to destroy the planet, it's not rational. It's not logical. You know what I mean? In the future, most of us will have this kind of machine that will be really little in our house. So, we just create our own meat as we like in our house. This is going to happen. So, maybe it will not happen with this age, but it will happen in a few years.

Manex [00:06:58] Filippo, I have to ask, what will this mean for farmers? I am sure that those farmers listening to you are getting a bit scared.

Filippo [00:07:06] Well, I definitely understand the fear. Most of them are running a business for decades; they could feel that we want to steal their job, we want to steal their life’s business. I think that in the history of humans, all the technologies raised a lot of fears about our job places, but we always saw that humans still found a way to work. And there are a lot of studies that show how cultivated meat could contain the place of work. So, I mean, it's okay, be worried about your job. But if we still have this kind of production, we will not have a future. It's not just a job. It's about our lives, the life of all humans.
Manex [00:07:67] And just to finish off, Filippo, environment obviously gets a lot of attention. It is a movement, and it is very digital. But do you think as citizens we behave sustainably, or do you think that we support the cause while not really changing our own behaviour?

Filippo [00:08:12] I don't know if you remember, maybe it was two or three years ago, when the Amazon forests were burned. So, you know, everyone would say on Instagram, "hashtag, pray for Amazon," “pray for Amazon,” “pray for Amazon.” Stop using hashtags and get informed through the internet. Why are we destroying that forest? Because just a simple burger makes a difference. I mean, right now, eating meat, you can eat meat, it's completely legal. You can do whatever you like, but don't fight for the environment and don't fight for the rights of people of South America. Because what you do has an impact, it's not easy work for this kind of topic. Even for me, I mean, it would be much easier eating meat, not care about anything. This is the role of the activists of tomorrow. It's not just a fight; it's living. It's making an example of what you're fighting for. You know what I mean?

Manex [00:09:09] Filippo, I love your conviction. Best of luck for your ECI. And thanks so much for joining us on CitizenCentral.

Filippo [00:09:15] Grazie a te for the opportunity. And thank you to everyone that listened to us. Ciao ciao.

Manex [00:09:26] As we were mentioning there, cultivated meat seems like something very futuristic, but perhaps this is not so far away in our future diets. To learn more about this technology, we now head over to the city of Pamplona in Spain to meet Javier Zaratiegui from Cocuus, a food start-up that is already testing new machinery and techniques to produce cultivated meat. Javier, thanks for joining us on CitizenCentral and please tell our listeners a little bit more about yourself.

Javier [00:09:58] Hello, I'm Javier. I am CEO at Cocuus. We are based in Spain. We are a start-up founded in 2017, and what we do is biosynthesis of new food. We do the machinery for the new products that the large food companies are developing. Nowadays, we have vegan bacon or plant-based bacon out of yellow pea protein. But we don't restrict ourselves to one product. So, whenever someone with protein comes to us, then we decide together what is the market, what is the shape and the product that we can develop. So far, we have done a whole lot of plant-based beef, a machine for the plant-based bacon, for shrimps and for tuna. But the sky's the limit.

Manex [00:10:42] You are already making me hungry. But these types of proteins are all plant-based. What about cultivated meat? How close to the sky is cultivated meat at Cocuus?

Javier [00:10:53] Well, the future is not just plant-based. As you say, cultivated meat is one thing that people are researching a lot. Instead of having a land, a large land for the beef to grow, to drink, instead of that and a killing, the specialist takes an injection, a shot of some cells of the animal. Those cells go to a biomass reactor; there the cells grow and multiply, and with that paste or that outcome of the reactor food scientists can build a little piece of beef or some nuggets or whatever product comes out. So, there is much less resources needed in terms of land, in terms of water. And, of course, the animal is not killed. So, that is one thing we are looking for, but that's not the only piece of the market. Plant-based is one thing. Algae is another thing. Fermentation is another way. So, this whole spectrum will bring new products for people, for the consumer. But their future is
already here. In Singapore and in the States you can already buy chicken grown in laboratory, and eventually will come the beef and other animals. And Europe is next.

**Manex [00:12:05]** So we’re already grasping this future. But if we were to transition to this source of protein, how would European nature change?

**Javier [00:12:14]** Well, we are in a moment in history that we have to be aware of limited resources and the impact of every technology that we do, the same way we are pushing forward the electric car. The food industry is already aware that there is too much energy and too many resources involved in growing animals and in feeding human beings. In the next 20 years it’s supposed to come another 2 billion people to the world. So, it’s quite a lot, and we cannot continue growing animals and food in the same ways we have done if we want to feed all these coming people. So, it has to be new technology and a new approach to growing food. And this is where we come in; livestock for beef, for example, takes one cow. It takes 190 litres of water per day. And in the future that can be unsustainable. So, instead of waiting for that moment, we are already looking one step ahead and solving a problem that eventually could come.

**Manex [00:13:15]** You were mentioning there other regions of the world, but here in the EU would a change in policy assist this transformation?

**Javier [00:13:23]** Well, the research is already there, but the research is one thing and legislation is another thing. Things have to go in parallel because if the final result is not approved, then the funding and the research is slowed down. So, we have already seen other areas of the world accepting this new food because it’s more sustainable and you can even enhance the quality of the proteins of regular food we take; some of them you cannot absorb the nutrients because they go through the acids of the stomach. So, it roughly gets 15% or 20% of those nutrients. Growing food in a laboratory, even if it sounds weird, will eventually be not only more sustainable for the planet, but also more beneficial to human beings. It’s normal that the politicians and the regulations go slowly, the same that we saw with the vaccines. There has to be research before getting things to humans, but it’s something that in a controlled area and controlled laboratory, if you pay attention to all the process, the results have to come well. So, it’s just a matter of time that the legislation comes and we see all these new products in the supermarkets.

**Manex [00:14:38]** Javier, had you ever heard about the ECI?

**Javier [00:14:41]** I remember the “Roaming Initiative.” And I was happy that you contacted me because I think this is a good way of bringing ideas and bringing things to the table to the politicians.

**Manex [00:14:53]** Oh, so you will be signing up for this one?

**Javier [00:14:57]** Of course.

**Manex [00:14:58]** Thanks so much for joining us on CitizenCentral, and I hope I can visit you soon and taste all of those alternative proteins.

**Javier [00:15:05]** You are welcome to come. Thank you.

**Manex [00:15:15]** Animals and animal origin products are an important element of our diets, but they are also key providers to our wardrobes. Furs are a traditional component of
garment industries, so we now head over to Brussels to meet Elise Fleury from “Fur Free Europe.” Elise, thanks for joining us on CitizenCentral and please tell us a little bit more about yourself.

**Elise [00:15:39]** Pleasure. Thanks for inviting me. So, I'm Elise Fleury, I'm senior campaigner at Eurogroup for Animals, which is an advocacy organisation for animal welfare. We represent about 85 member organisations throughout the EU but also a bit beyond, and personally I'm half French, half Dutch, but I'm living in Brussels.

**Manex [00:16:01]** So Elise, what exactly is your ECI “Fur Free Europe” asking the Commission for?

**Elise [00:16:06]** So, our ECI is called “Fur Free Europe,” and we are calling for two things. First of all, a ban on fur farming, putting an end to fur production within the EU, and then also a ban on the placement of fur products within the EU markets. So, basically a marketing ban also, which will also mean no imports or exports.

**Manex [00:16:28]** Very well, Elise. But some of our listeners may be thinking this is already banned in Europe.

**Elise [00:16:32]** In some Member States the fur production is already banned, but we are still having Member States where there is no ban or no restriction at all. And this means that, for example, with the COVID crisis when we had some COVID outbreaks in fur farms, this led to some temporary bans, for example, like in Denmark. And so, fur farms in Denmark went to Greece, where there is no regulation to continue their fur farming. So, this shows that we need the EU response and not just a Member State response to this issue.

**Manex [00:17:04]** I know you are a very tight-knit group so where did your ECI start from? How did you bring this team together?

**Elise [00:17:11]** Well, before we decided to go for the ECI, we wanted to make sure that we had enough support within the network. So, this meant talking with our existing member organisations but also beyond, because an ECI really should represent all citizens. So, it should not be limited to our own direct network. So, I started to engage with other animal welfare organisations throughout the EU, especially those who we knew were working on this issue, to see if they had an interest in joining us. We can really see a difference in legislation and in the will in general to do something between countries where there is no fur farming and countries where there is still. So, for example, if you take the Nordic countries like Finland, etc., it's way more difficult there to get a move, although and despite the fact that their citizens have already mentioned or expressed their will to stop this. But when it comes to politics, of course everyone knows that the fur industry is quite powerful. And so, because there is big economic interest at stake, you can see that in those countries where there's still this industry, it is more difficult to get political progress.

**Manex [00:18:21]** How has this ECI been received in the political front, Elise?

**Elise [00:18:24]** Everyone agrees, or at least the majority of people also at the political level when it's about individuals, that this is an outdated practise and that this should be stopped. Nevertheless, there again, you can sometimes feel also that depending on the country of origin, it is a bit more difficult.
Manex [00:18:42] People really care about animal welfare. So, has the press been very supportive?

Elise [00:18:47] We did have a lot of coverage, especially at the launch, because we did get a lot of numbers of signatures within the first day because we had about 50,000 signatures. So, already with this first day, it attracted a lot of media attention also because I think it was the first time in the European Citizen Initiative’s history that one country met the threshold on the first day, and that was Finland, which is also very good because Finland is a strategic country when it comes to fur farming. So, we did get quite some coverage in the EU bubble, as we say, from media, European media, and then at national level, I think it might come a bit later. For now, we’re really trying more to focus on public attraction rather than media attention because also an ECI is not a sprint, it's a marathon. And so, we need to pick our battles. So, for now, we’re really focusing on engaging the citizens and getting them on board.

Manex [00:19:43] Elise, 50,000 signatures on the opening date might be an ECI record. What is the plan to reach the million signatures?

Elise [00:19:51] First of all, as I said before, is to make sure that we have as many representatives of the civil society on board. Again, this is a citizen initiative, so we’re really talking in the name of the citizens. So, we’re really representing them through a strong network. So, this is why having as many organisations on board is essential. So, one of the biggest parts of the strategy was really to make sure that we had as many animal welfare organisations on board. The fur issue is, of course, the main concern for us, the animal welfare aspect, but it also touches upon the environment and public health as we mentioned also with COVID. So, for us, it’s really important that we really represent the citizens in this. So, that was really part of the strategy. And then, well, you need to empower citizens to spread the word. So, the other part of the strategy was, of course, to make sure that we had enough materials and that we were able to provide everyone with enough content to be able to share the message. So, not just sign, but also share your message with your friends, with your family, and make sure this is really a huge movement. I have to say, we are lucky enough because in the animal welfare movement, usually people who are supporting an NGO active on this topic are also really engaged because they really want to make a difference. So, we are lucky enough to count already a lot of activists just among this network of supporters of all these NGOs. But yes, definitely, it’s very important that people don’t just do the first step, which is essential, which is signing, but also spread the word because it’s really about making history. So, everyone should feel concerned.

Manex [00:21:31] You kicked off with so much force. So, how is that signature collection going? Do you think the million is achievable?

Elise [00:21:39] Actually, it’s one million validated signatures that you need to get for an ECI, so you should not have the target of one million, but actually more. So, we would like to have 1.4, for example, with this ECI before saying, OK, we can now submit this ECI; and of course you need to do that within one year because that’s the legal timing of ECI. I have to say that we can be very happy because it’s been a bit more than six months, and I think that we should reach the one million. So, we are all very, very happy about this. But as I said, it doesn’t mean it’s over yet, especially also because when you work in communication, you know that the one million is really a symbolic threshold, and people might think that now it’s over so there’s no need to sign. So, we will have to really make sure that people understand that we need more than that. And the more, the better, of
course, because if the European Commission knows that there is really such a strong call from its citizens on this issue, well, it will be the better also to reach our political goal. So, we're very happy, but we know it's not done.

**Manex [00:22:44]** Wow, Elise. First of all, congratulations. But in this process, you have probably had to explain your ECI to people that know nothing about fur farming. So, how is your initial pitch of the initiative? What do people have to have 100% clear about this practise?

**Elise [00:23:00]** I think I would say that farmed animals is something that we all know is a reality. The problem with fur farms is that we're talking about wild animals that are farmed, that are trapped in cages, and this is just not possible. So, you cannot improve the condition of a wild animal in a cage, even if you add on another metre in this cage. This is not possible because it's intrinsically not compatible with their lives. So, this is why even more in fur farms than in other farms, you will see examples of cannibalism, dead animals, animals that are really getting crazy, etc. So, there is this ethical problem at first about having wild animals that are captured and farmed. Then the other aspect also is that here we're not talking about things that are essential for humans to continue their life. I mean, maybe 100 years ago you needed fur to keep yourself warm. Now it's not the case anymore. So, here really we're talking about fashion again. It's also linked to ethics. It is not necessary. And also, we know that there are a lot of industries now that are investing in faux fur, sustainable materials that are replacing real fur perfectly and that are harmless to the animals. So, there is really no point for this when it comes to the life of the animals, but also humans who are wearing fur.

**Manex [00:24:22]** As you were saying there, 100 years ago, fur farming was a traditional practise. I imagine they would say that the synthetic alternatives are not natural products. But is this the reality of farming furs? Are they really natural?

**Elise [00:24:38]** No, this is clearly the counterargument from the fur industry, to say that faux fur materials are made of plastic so they are not sustainable, etc. But actually, if you look at the facts, real fur takes much more energy to be produced and to be then destroyed than faux fur products. Also, we know that nowadays when you launch a new industry, you need to factor in the environmental costs, etc. So, all those new brands and corporates that are now investing a lot in faux fur products have this argument and this conduct line in mind when they launch their products. But above all, at some point it's just about ending ancient cruel practises, and this should be the bottom line. And then you find solutions for the fur farms to help them, you know, convert to other types of farms. We have seen a lot of positive examples in Italy, etc. There are some reports covering this, so you help others to change. But you should, we should as a society, accept change in a positive way. For example, there is this documentary called “Slay” that was released in September. You could share the link with your audience. It really shows that, indeed it's a terrible practise also, when it comes to the environment, but people are not aware of that. You know, people are not even aware sometimes that they are wearing fur. So, I'm not talking about the people who are consciously saying no, but real fur is better. But also in general, citizens are buying sometimes, you know, like you have your winter hats with the pompon; this is usually made of real fur, and people don't know it. There is a lot of misinformation or no information among people. I think most of the people don't imagine that actually to get your coat done, you need dozens of animals because it's not just a bit of an animal that you need for a coat. And they don't think that the animals are farmed for the purpose of their coat. They think it's a derived product. I would really say at some point, can you really, you know, look at yourself in the mirror knowing that you're part of
the suffering of all those animals? If you're a bit sensitive to all the fashion and how you look, be aware that most brands are now shifting to stopping real fur so you can be posh with faux fur.

**Manex [00:27:02]** Loud and clear. Elise, thanks so much for joining us on CitizenCentral.

**Elise [00:27:06]** My pleasure, Manex. Thanks so much.

**Manex [00:27:22]** That brings season two of CitizenCentral to an end. Thanks to all our guests and of course, to you for listening. If you want to learn more about any of the ECIs, please check our show notes. I hope you have enjoyed the season and also learnt about topics and people shaping the Europe of tomorrow. And of course, I hope you are looking forward to season three, where we will discover ongoing and new initiatives kicking off their ECI campaigns, while exploring several successful initiatives of the past and their impact for each and every European citizen. I'm Manex Rekarte Cowie, and you have been listening to CitizenCentral.