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INSECT-BASED EDIBLES, NEW PRODUCT, PROCESSED FOOD

Thai Company Marketing Cricket-Based Pasta

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The concept of eating insects, or being able to buy consumer products made from insects, is hardly new. What is new – relatively new, anyway – is the exceptionally wide range of bug-based products in the U.S., the U.K., Australia, the Far East and elsewhere.

One of the latest players in this growing field is Thailand-based Bugsolutely, whose first product, Cricket Pasta, was launched late last year – mere months after this company was founded.

With crickets being 70% protein, that necessary dietary ingredient is, of course, a significant portion of Cricket Pasta's volume. The company's web site (<http://www.newfoodmagazine.com/21722/news/industry-news/bugsolutely-launches-innovative-pasta-made-from-crickets/>) stresses, though, that this pasta also contains goodly amounts of calcium, iron, vitamin B12 and Omega 3 oil.

From a food production perspective, crickets are an excellent protein source because they require very little water. Not by coincidence, this and the fact they can be easily raised, in a 'farm-like-way, makes crickets an excellent food source for creatures other than humans that humans, for whatever reason, keep and sustain as a 'hobby'. (Such creatures include birds, fish and even other insects, many of which have, in captivity, been fed mealworms. However, "In recent times ([the] past

twenty years) the Common House Cricket has slowly emerged as a much better feeder insect since it is more digestible, easier to gutload and dust with nutrients and is more readily acceptable than the harder skinned mealworm," says the Chameleon News (<http://www.chameleonnews.com/03JanWellsCrickets.html>) website. (Who'd have imagined such a site would exist?)

Who, indeed, would have imagined that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations would produce, close to three years ago, a report entitled "Edible Insects: Future Prospects for Food and Feed Security (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3253e/i3253e.pdf>)?"

Well, not only did the FAO generate such a report, it has since been the inspiration for such unlikely studies as one at the School of Visual Arts in New York City where, Popular Science (<http://www.popsci.com/rise-incredible-edible-insect>) magazine reported last May, students Lucy Knops and Julie Plevin soberly set about coming up, in 2013, with something they called Critter Bitters, combining alcohol of several sorts – Bourbon, vodka, and neutral grain spirits – with carefully preserved remains of once-thriving crickets, then macerating the combinations – they did similar studies with other bugs, too – long enough for the latter to absorb and integrate the essence, as it were, of the former. The result? Something some people might take a fancy to drinking.

"The case needs to be made to consumers that eating insects is not only good for their health, it is good for the planet," Knops and Plevin wrote in a paper on their project. They figured that while cricket-based bitters might not solve the food problem, the product could help overcome a psychological one.

"People are more open to trying new things when there are cocktails involved," Plevin says.

People also seem inclined, and have been for eons, to try eating insects when they are slathered in chocolate. And why not? Both have nutritional value and can be said to be good for you – in appropriate doses, of course.

Fortune Magazine (<http://fortune.com/2015/08/25/edible-insects-bug-startups/>) last August had a feature article that declared, "Insect eating is common in 80% of the world's countries – but not in the U.S. or Europe. Now several entrepreneurs are working to bring the edible insect market to the U.S. and Europe."

That article went on to note that an array of restaurants, including Toloache in New York City and Typhoon in Santa Monica CA, now offer assorted insect-based items on their menus – items such as grasshopper tacos (<http://toloachenyc.com/media/dinner.pdf>) (see 2nd column from right) and stir-fried silkworm pupae (<http://typhoon.biz/menus>) (right hand column, along with a selection of other insect-based offerings).

Entomarket.com (<http://www.entomarket.com/?gclid=CI3yupOIqMoCFYUWHwodYmwLiQ>) offers a broad assortment of insect-based edibles, as does Amazon (http://www.amazon.com/Exo-Cricket-Flour-Protein-Bars/dp/B00SNZV22Y/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1439842971&sr=8-3&keywords=cricket+protein+bars) (and here (http://www.amazon.com/Bitty-Foods/b/ref=bl_dp_s_web_10419836011?ie=UTF8&node=10419836011&field-lbr_brands_browse-bin=Bitty+Foods)).

Melanie Haiken reported in Forbes in July of 2014 how scientists and others involved in panel discussions at the Institute of Food Technologies (<https://www.ift.org/>) meeting a month earlier declared that “insects are the food of the future.”

“Not only are they good for you,” she wrote, they’re a low-cost alternative to animal protein with far less impact on the environment.”

Ms Haiken went on:

“And we’re going to need new sources of protein, because as time goes on there’s just not going to be enough meat to go around. Consider these startling stats:

- 70 million: The number of people added to the planet’s population every year
- 9 billion: The world population by 2050 as projected by current population growth rates
- 70 percent: The percentage of agricultural land devoted to livestock production
- 30 percent: The percentage of all the world’s land used to raise livestock

If you are really interested in this subject, as many people *should* be, that FAO report (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3253e/i3253e.pdf>) will be an eye-opener. It discusses, among other things, ‘farming’ insects, how available various ones are in several countries, examples of promising edible insect products for human consumption, and much, much more.