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Mamma mia! Thai insect company puts s-bug-hetti on the pasta menu

By RJ Whitehead , 21-Jan-2016
Last updated on 21-Jan-2016 at 08:52 GMT

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Related tags: Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Insects, Health, Nutrition, Diet, Business, Pasta, Dairy, Milk, Infant formula, Palm oil, Exports

Thai edible insect processor Bugsolutely is taking on the pasta market with a product made with flour from ground crickets.

According to Massimo Reverberi, Bugsolutely's Italian founder, Cricket Pasta features exceptional nutritional values, including high levels of protein, calcium, iron, vitamin B12 and omega-3.

"Protein is the key to the flour, as 70% of crickets are made of protein," he said.

Sustainability features as a further selling point, with crickets requiring 1,000 times less food and water than cows, while needing a very short time to be "reared".

"For this reason, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and other International bodies have been supporting the diffusion of edible insects in western countries, while insects are already part of the human diet in Asia, South America and Africa," Reverberi added. "According to the experts, insects are the protein of the future."

Bugsolutely Cricket Pasta, a mix of durum semolina flour, wheat flour and cricket flour, is the result of months of research in collaboration with several manufacturers, he said.

The ingredients are sourced from selected suppliers that are GMP and HACCP certified, while the final product is FDA approved.

Last October, the European Parliament voted in favour of a new regulation leading to a green light

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for edible insects. In Switzerland, food from insects is currently going through a year-long “test phase”.

And though it is not specifically regulated—the FDA only requires the edible insects to be raised for human consumption and the food to be safe—the North American market is picking up quickly, according to Reverberi.

Against this backdrop, more than 100 international start-ups entered the edible insect market in 2015 alone. Among these, Bugsolutely is a business focused on developing, making and exporting foods made from edible insect flours.

Founded last year in Bangkok, Bugsolutely is right at the core of the edible bug business, says Reverberi, though his aim is to target the markets of Europe and North America, where he is in the process of arranging distribution. Southeast Asia, he says, where there is a tradition of consuming insect protein, is not on Bugsolutely's radar as the market largely sees it as old-fashioned.

“They want to get rid of these traditions because that’s what their grandparents were doing. But that will all change once insects become cool in the western world, which will happen.”

“Our products are the result of our research into finding the best possible combination for a tasty, healthy food. Our export strategy to western countries is based on partnership with international food distributors and on powerful online marketing campaigns.”

The edible bug phenomenon, amplified by wide press coverage, should come as a surprise Reverberi says. The only hurdle is many people still associate insects as ‘creepy’.

“Westerners might regularly eat frightening and unhealthy dishes, but they have still developed a cultural, subconscious disgust for ants or crickets. Our cricket pasta breaks this mould, by processing the crickets into a fine flour. With the shape of the cricket gone, the perception of the product completely changes.”

And how does the product, which is currently available through the Bugsolutely website as fusilli in a 350g sealed package, taste?

Reverberi says: *“Thanks to the cricket flour, the pasta’s distinctive brown colour matches its typical earthy taste – the taste of which is often associated with roasted almonds.”*

Other pasta formats are being prepared ahead of their release later this year.

More stories from southeast Asia...

Morinaga expands in SE Asia through new Singapore subsidiary

Morinaga Milk will establish a subsidiary in Singapore to capitalise on southeast Asian demand for infant nutrition.

Morinaga Nutritional Foods, the latest link in the Japan’s dairy major’s chain of global expansion, will handle functional and food ingredients, including Bifidobacterium longum BB536 and other probiotics, whey proteins, lactose, lactoferrin and hydrolysates for use in high-value nutritional products such as infant formulas by global and local customers.



“Singapore is now becoming a focal point for major global infant formula manufacturers and raw material suppliers as a location to strengthen their sales activities in southeast Asia and Pacific Rim countries. Thus we selected Singapore for the base of our ingredient sales activity in the region,” said Ko Shiino, a general manager of Morinaga Milk.

“The location will enable the new subsidiary to better and faster serve its Asia-Pacific customers and meet the growing market demand.”

“We are well prepared to take this step to expand our ingredient business in the area and

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contribute to human health and nutrition throughout the world."

Morinaga Milk, which achieved net sales of US\$5bn in 2015, is a market leader in Japan where it produces brand-name products across the yogurt, milk, infant formula, beverage, cheese, butter, ice cream, pudding, dietary supplements and clinical foods segments.

It began a process of international expansion in 1972 with the establishment of German subsidiary Milei and has been actively expanding exports of its functional and food ingredients, such as probiotics, lactoferrin and whey protein to leading infant formula manufacturers.

The company also has joint-ventures and subsidiaries in China, the Netherlands, Indonesia and America for the sale and production of dairy products, infant formulas, food ingredients and long shelf-life tofu.

**Palm oil update: Production growth expected to slow due to poor weather
Indonesia exported 21m tonnes of palm oil in 2014, a figure that is expected to increase to 21.6m tonnes in 2015, according to a new study by Research & Markets.**

Indonesia is the largest palm oil producer in the world, followed by Malaysia and Thailand.

Indonesia and Malaysia together account for over 85% of the world supply of palm oil. The former nation produced 31m tonnes of palm oil in 2014, though Research & Markets predicts that the country's 2015 production will experience limited growth due to poor weather due to the El Niño phenomenon, which has delivered reduced rainfall in southeast Asia.



This is coupled with the fact that old trees have become unproductive and younger trees have not yet attained the optimal production age.

The major recipients for Indonesia's crop include China, India, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Singapore from key producers such as Astra Agro Lestari, Bakrie Sumatera Plantations and Indofood Sukses Makmur.

According to the report, palm oil is now the most widely produced category of vegetable oil produced globally, despite high environmental concerns around its production.

The global consumption of palm oil has grown consistently at approximately 7% per annum for the last two decades. At the same time, global demand has grown substantially as it receives a boost from increased consumption in emerging Asian economies, primarily India and China.

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