

Hey there UK! Why aren't you eating Insects?

Description



Why Environmentalists Want Us All To Eat Insects

Hey there UK! Why aren't you eating Insects? They're tiny terrors to some, but to a large percentage of the world, including many countries in Africa and Asia, they're nutritious delicacies and environmentally-friendly to raise.

This is according to a gathering of people who are passionate about entomophagy, or eating insects, who advertised their cause this week at the SXSW Eco meeting in Austin, Texas.

Insects are a common source of food throughout the world, including much of Latin America, Africa and Asia. One could say that those of us in the Western world, where insect binging isn't common, are the odd ones out, said Robert Allen, founder of the nonprofit Little Herds, which encourages insect ingestion.

Consider the common house cricket, *Acheta domesticus*. Their bodies contain every essential amino acid, several times more calcium than beef or pork and nine times more iron than chicken, Allen said. Crickets can be fed on waste products like brewer's yeast (a byproduct of beer making), and cricket farming produces 2,800 times less greenhouse gas emissions than cattle raising, he added. Insects also require very little land to raise and do well in small cages.

Unlike larger animals like chickens or cows, crickets “love to be crowded together in the dark,” said Harmon Johar, chief innovation officer of food company Aspire. “You can stack boxes of these things on top of each other” — these crickets don’t mind,” added Johar, who first started raising crickets in his dorm-room closet when he was a student at the University of Georgia.

One of Aspire’s brands, Aketta, sells cricket flour that can be purchased online or at several stores in the Austin area. The product, which is made up of more than two-thirds protein, can be used to make baked goods like chocolate chip cookies and bread. Grasshoppers are also available seasonally at local Mexican restaurant La Condesa. Chapul bars, made from crickets, can be purchased at at least three grocery stores, Allen said.

Reviews of these products highlight the mixed feelings people have toward insect-laden food. One Chapul bar reviewer on Amazon said the snacks “taste weird.” But to another they were “weirdly good. You would never know that this is actually made of crickets.”

Many Americans tend to be a little grossed out by the idea of eating insects. But this is an entirely cultural phenomenon, said Allen, as they are gulped down with glee around the world. And kids typically don’t cringe at the idea, he said.

Johar agreed. “We find that kids have no fear whatsoever [of eating insects].” Usually parents have to tear them away,” he said.

These insect-eating experts are working to change perceptions and hope that a culinary shift toward accepting insect ingestion is already happening. Raw fish and lobster were once considered uncouth to eat a few decades ago, for example. But now sushi restaurants bring in billions worldwide, and lobster is one of the more expensive types of seafood on the market.



Chocolate covered edible Insectsâ€¦! mmmmmm!

There continue to be more edible insect products on the market every year, and the industry has at least doubled in size annually since 2010, Johar said.

University of Wisconsin epidemiology Ph.D. student Rachel Bergmans, a panelist at the event, is trying to introduce a mealworm-farming kit to Zambian farmers. She said the effort could help provide a sustainable and environmentally-friendly source of food and has been warmly received so far by Zambians.

Johar doesnâ€™t recommend eating wild-caught insects, due to the possibility of naturally occurring pathogens. Currently, insect parts are considered â€œfood additivesâ€ and must be carefully prepared (heated to 350 degrees Fahrenheit, for example), besides being dried and often ground up, for instance, into cricket powder.

But Johar and the other panelists said that insects should be considered commodities, like sugar or beef, which would encourage growth in the sector.

Most vegetarians and animal welfare activists seem to view the idea of entomophagy positively, at least compared with other types of animal eating, Johar said.

Crickets are usually killed by being slowly cooled and eventually frozen. But before they die, they go into a hibernation-like state that occurs during natural cold spells.

â€œWe call it karma killingâ€”no fear, no pain, no panic,â€ Harmon said.

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Date Created

October 14, 2014

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