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## Feed Focus: Insects – Our Future Food?



### Fast FACTS

- If you can forgive the yuck factor, insects make sense as an alternative food source because they appeal to the growing number of consumers with protein-rich diets, with natural, plant-rich diets seeking protein alternatives, and those concerned with sustainable and responsible food sourcing
- The biggest short-term potential we believe lies in "lean protein" insect flour, namely cricket flour - which is being used as a key ingredient in cricket-flour protein bars in the UK and US
- The insect farming/producing industry has scored impressive investment - most notably from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's sister, Arielle Zuckerberg - whose VC firm gave an undisclosed amount to California cricket farm Tiny Farm

*Pictured: Chapulines at Oaxaca market courtesy of Matthew Fleet*

By Ashleigh Togher

Despite being consumed by 2 billion people worldwide, eating insects in the Western world largely remains a cultural taboo. But that's all changing.

Fuelling the rising status of insect eating – or entomophagy – is the strong and sustained consumer interest in protein-rich diets, in natural, plant-rich diets and in sustainable and responsible food sourcing.

Insects pack a powerful protein punch in very few calories – half of the average insect's mass is protein, with far fewer resources needed to farm insects – about 100lbs of feed is needed to create 1lb of cricket meat, compared to the 1,250lbs needed for the same amount of beef, and it is a safe assumption that the amount of water, land and greenhouse gas emissions are minimised in insect farming – though, as an emerging market, there is much debate as to the actual scale of this.

And in terms of the plant-rich diet set, most meat substitutes come highly processed, with a plethora of additives and flavourings, plus soy and wheat products that many modern consumers have issues digesting – leaving wide open a market for healthy, natural meat substitutes.

That all said, insects as a food source makes great sense...there's just the deeply rooted cultural aversion to eating creepy-crawlies to contend with. It may be an entertaining novelty to eat an insect tasting board like at [Grub Kitchen](#) in Pembrokeshire, UK – but in the short term we think the most potential lies in the largely unoffensive, slightly nutty and savoury-tasting insect protein flours.

[EXO](#) in the US and [Gathr Foods](#) and [Grub](#) in the UK are insect snack/flour producers, and have been converting clean-eating Paleo types with their promise of lean protein, namely with their cricket-flour protein bars that come in a melange of pretty normal protein-bar flavours, including: apple cinnamon, banana bread, cacao and coconut, coffee and vanilla, cacao and peanut, etc.

Grub also produce a range of roast insect snacks, including crispy roast crickets, mealworms, grasshoppers and buffalo worms – like a savoury, protein-packed alternative to crisps, in flavours like chilli and lime, salt and vinegar and English herbs. We recently spotted these being sold via vending machine at music festival Secret Garden Party in Oxfordshire.

The world of entomophagy has also been enjoying some high-profile advocacy from the likes of Questlove, author of *somethingtofoodabout* and main man of The Roots, and some serious investment from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's sister, Arielle Zuckerberg of venture capitalist firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers – specifically investing in California cricket producer [Tiny Farms](#). See this [Wired](#) article for more on the impressive investments that have been made across the sector.

Cracking this cultural taboo is likely to be slow – but judging by the inspiring innovation and investment occurring – also steady, with the next generation likely to be going full cricket. As of now, expect the most nature-focused of restaurants to be dipping their toe into insect gastronomy (Copenhagen's Noma has a history of just this) – like baking cricket-flour blend breads and using crispy crumbled insects as a nutrient-packed texture boost on top of dishes, plus looking to the foods of Asia and Africa – places with a long-held tradition of entomophagy – for insect inspiration.

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