

Insects can help feed the world, international conference concludes

In May, 450 participants at a conference in the Netherlands, co-organized by Wageningen University and Research Centre and FAO, learned a lot more about “Insects to feed the world”.



Feed industry leaders, insect breeders, universities, NGOs and other stakeholders gathered for this first-ever event and left with a clear message: insects for feed and food are viable solutions for the protein deficit problem.

I [Hands up who has ever eaten an insect?](#)

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As the first-ever international event of its kind, the conference on “Insects to feed the world” provided a holistic review of issues related to the gathering and farming of insects for primarily human consumption and animal feed, but also of their potential application in medicinal products and as a source of raw materials for industrial processing in the non-feed sectors.

Acknowledged as a milestone because of its recognition of the professional insect industry, the conference had several thematic sessions covering: harvesting from nature; production of insects as food and feed; food safety, legislation and policy; insects as feed: specific production systems; nutrition, processing, consumer attitudes and gastronomy; environmental issues; and outreach and communication.

The 450 participants, from 45 countries and representing the private sector, civil society, research Institutions, government and international organizations, presented and discussed their work in eight plenary and 18 parallel sessions. Three poster sessions attracted 112

presentations and 54 posters, and fifteen exhibition booths offered displays of work by private companies, international agencies and civil society groups.

The two field excursions provided opportunities to visit the University's facilities on entomology and food and feed testing, and to witness firsthand its research on insects as well as an insect rearing and processing hub in North Brabant province.

Research and business activities on insects for food and feed have increased spectacularly over the past few years and because of the fast-growing body of scientific literature and increasing global interest, the Wageningen Academic Publishers have created an online-only, peer-reviewed scientific journal: the [*Journal of Insects as Food and Feed*](#). Its first volume will be published in 2015 and will include papers presented at the Conference.

The Conference ended with a series of conclusions:

- It highlighted the rapidly growing and dynamic nature of using insects for food and feed worldwide, and identified far more potential and ongoing activities for using insects and their products, including for health care as well as a source of raw material in the non-food sectors.
- Insects' potential as human food or animal feed is very relevant in view of: their good nutritional quality; human population growth, including with higher demands for food from animal proteins (meat and fish); the fast-rising costs and quantities needed of major protein sources (fish and soybean meal) to feed the growing number of farmed animals; and the high environmental impact of our current food habits (high meat consumption) and animal farming practices (fed with human-grade feed grains that could be directly consumed by humans).
- A wide range of socioeconomic opportunities based on using insects are accessible at any scale of production both in developed and developing countries, such as jobs creation, enterprise development, food and animal feed production, organic waste processing and for expanding global trade.

- Major challenges include: further awareness raising in public opinion to promote insects as healthy food for humans and feed for animals; influence policymakers to approve insect-inclusive food and feed legislation; further research to provide and expand the available scientific evidence and benefits of using insects in the food and feed chains, using validated data.
- There remains a wide gap between activities being conducted in developing countries (largely for food for human consumption) and the high-tech large-scale industrial initiatives focusing on feed for livestock and aquaculture (primarily in developed countries).
- FAO and Wageningen University's global leadership and support in this fast unfolding sector were widely acknowledged and appreciated.

The conference's main findings, conclusions and recommendations are summarized in an e-report that is available for free downloading from the [FAO Edible Insects webpage](#) .