Yen (2009) Edible Insects

Yen, Alan L.


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“Edible insects: Traditional knowledge or western phobia?” By Alan L. Yen

This article covers many facets of entomophagy, which is the practice of eating bugs. This practice has been widely used in traditional societies in Africa, Asia, Central America, South America and Australia. Yen first explains which insects these societies consume, and ways to prepare them. He also gives reasons for their consumption; mainly because they are a good source of protein and other nutrients. Yen also proposes that they are vital to the world’s food security, as we are faced with limited resources for producing the protein that all humans need.

After explaining the traditional uses of bugs, we should be focusing on changing our attitude surrounding the practice. Bugs can be used directly as nutrition for humans, or indirectly as food for our livestock. Using bugs indirectly in this way can “reduce adverse environmental effects of animal protein production” (Yen 2009;290) Yen emphasizes the fact that traditional cultures already have extensive knowledge about which bugs to eat, how to find or harvest them, how to prepare them, and which bug species to avoid (for both nutritional and environmental reasons). We would be very smart to look to these peoples for their guidance in our campaign to change the Western societies’ views regarding entomophagy.

I consider myself to be at least somewhat conscious of my impact on our environment. Our society as a whole, and Western New York specifically being such a farmer-oriented area, could benefit greatly by adopting the practice of entomophagy. I agree with Yen that the first and hardest barrier to break through is the attitude our society has regarding eating bugs of any kind. Introducing or promoting the idea based on its positive benefits to the environment is an excellent idea that I think would work well, especially for more-environmentally focused people. The idea of reducing my environmental footprint is appealing to me, and this article could guide my journey to do so. Yen stresses the “need for Western societies to reduce the size of their environmental footprint” (Yen 2009;289). There will always be those who would never consider entomophagy, either directly or indirectly, but I feel that many would welcome at least knowledge about it.

I also like the idea of learning from traditional cultures about their practices. In the United States we are very stuck in our ways, and have not adopted many other ethnic food choices into our diets. Entomophagy has been presented, in shows like Fear Factor, to be gross and disgusting, and to be seen as a challenge, not normal to everyday life or resource sustainability. These attitudes need to be altered so we can take advantage of the phenomenal resource presented in this article. Food taboos have always intrigued me, and it was insightful to learn that approximately 3000 ethnic groups in 113 countries eat bugs (Yen 2009). As Westerners we are missing out on a great and practically inexhaustible resource.