



While insects can be slimy, cringe-inducing creatures, often squashed on sight by humans, a new book released yesterday by the [Food and Agricultural Organization](#) (FAO) says beetles, wasps and caterpillars are also an unexplored nutrition source that can help address global food insecurity.

The book, *Edible Insects: future prospects for food and feed security*, stresses not just the nutritional value of insects, but also the benefits that insect farming could potentially have on the environment and on addressing the rapidly increasing demand for food worldwide.

While the idea of eating a worm, grasshopper or cicada at every meal may seem strange, FAO says this has many health benefits. Insects are high in protein, fat and mineral contents. They can be eaten whole or ground into a powder or paste, and incorporated into other foods.

"Insects are not harmful to eat, quite the contrary. They are nutritious, they have a lot of protein and are considered a delicacy in many countries," said Eva Muller, the Director of FAO's Forest

Economics, Policy and Products Division.

Although they are not staples of Western cuisine, insects currently supplement the diets of some 2 billion people and have always been part of human diets in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Of the 1 million known insect species, 1900 are consumed by humans. Some of the most consumed insects include beetles, caterpillars, bees, wasps, ants, grasshoppers, locusts and crickets.

"If we think about edible insects, there's a huge potential that has essentially not been tapped yet," Ms. Muller said. "Most [insects] are just collected and there's very little experience in insect farming, for example, which is something that could be explored in view of a growing population."

By 2030, over 9 billion people will need to be fed, along with the billions of animals raised annually for food and as pets.

The food industry, including industry professionals and chefs, must also help raise awareness about insects' potential as food to increase the level of acceptance among consumers.

"Although it is unrealistic to see families in the West eating insects for their Sunday lunch within the next decade, the potential of insects is huge and we hope that slowly but surely this potential will be realized," Ms. Halloran, a consultant for the FAO Edible Insects Program.

Source: [UN News Centre](#) / [FAO](#)