

Study reveals drivers of Western consumers' readiness to eat insects

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The most likely early adopters of insets as a meat substitute in Western societies are young men with weak attitudes toward meat, who are open to trying novel foods and interested in the environmental impact of their food choice. With a low level of food neophobia, the likelihood that this type of person is willing to eat insects as a meat substitute is estimated more than 75%, according to a new study published in *Food Quality and Preference*.

The study investigates the role of personal and [food](#)-related attitudinal determinants of [consumers'](#) readiness to adopt [insects](#) as a [meat substitute](#). It was conducted in Flanders, Belgium and involved a population of typical Western meat consumers. One out of five participants claimed to be ready (16.3%) or definitely ready (3.0%) to eat insects as a meat substitute. Men were found to be more than twice as likely than women to do so. A 10-year increase in age led to a 27% decrease in the likelihood of eating insects. "Men and younger consumers seem to have a more adventurous taste orientation or they find the idea of consuming insects less disgusting than women and older consumers", said Wim Verbeke, senior investigator and professor of agro-food marketing and consumer behavior at Ghent University.

Food neophobia or aversion to new foods emerged as the most influential factor. The study also found an additional effect of food technology neophobia. "This indicates that insects are not only perceived as a novel food but also as a food that is produced by unknown and unfamiliar technologies, thus leading to uncertainty and adverse

reactions among consumers. Informing them about how insects are grown might thus positively influence their readiness to adopt insects", Verbeke added.

The 2013 FAO 'Edible Insects' report found insects compared favorably to meat in terms of environmental impact and feed conversion. The consumer study confirmed that people recognize the environmental benefits of the eating of insects instead of meat . "An increase of one unit in the importance attached to the [environmental impact](#) of [food choice](#) increased a person's likelihood of eating insects by more than 70%. By contrast, consumers were not yet convinced about the possible health benefits of eating insects", said Verbeke.

"Consumer insight, such as provided by this study, is important for a successful positioning and marketing of insects or insect protein in Western societies, either as a food for human consumption or as a protein source in animal feed. A stronger acceptance of insects in Western societies may in turn contribute to halting the reduction in the use of insects in developing countries where insect-eating is now in decline owing to an increasing westernization of local traditional diets", he concluded.

More information: The complete report is available online: [DOI: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2014.07.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2014.07.008)

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