

Edible insects and plant-based proteins to be the subject of classroom debates

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Edible insects and plant-based alternatives to meat will be discussed with children as part of new research.

The project, led by academics at Cardiff University and the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol), aims to find out children's attitudes to environmental issues and how this translates into views on the food they eat.

Focusing on learners of primary school age (5 to 11) and their teachers in Wales, the research will use surveys, workshops, interviews and focus groups to explore young people's understandings and experiences of alternative proteins. Teachers will also give their input on how these discussions should take place in the classroom.

As well as published research, the project aims to provide resources for schools to help them deliver lessons on the environmental impact of what people put on their plates.

The first phase, which starts this week, involves initial surveys with teachers at schools in south Wales.

Dr. Christopher Bear, based at Cardiff University's School of Geography and Planning, said, "Young people's voices are becoming increasingly prominent in discussions on environmental futures and animal welfare. Embodied in Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future movement, their highlighting of intensive livestock farming's greenhouse gas emissions has been especially high-profile.

"But there is still little research on how these values translate into food consumption attitudes and practices among children. This research project is an opportunity for us to find out how young people of primary age envisage the role of [edible insects](#) and plant-based proteins in more sustainable and ethical food futures."

Dr. Verity Jones of UWE Bristol said, "The introduction of the new curriculum in Wales, which puts an emphasis on developing ethical and

sustainable citizenship through formal education, gives us an opportunity to work with schools so that teachers are given the right tools and children are empowered to explore some of these complex issues.

"While focusing on Wales, the findings and resources will speak to similar concerns and developments internationally."

Carl Evans, Headteacher of Roch Community Primary School in Pembrokeshire, which is taking part in the project, said, "At the school we recognize the important connection between our local community, food production and wider global issues surrounding sustainable development. We know these issues are important to children, but also difficult to make sense of and can often be confusing for them. We welcome the opportunity to work with academics from Cardiff and UWE Bristol to explore these issues and support children in developing critical thinking around sustainable citizenship."

Consumers in the UK have shown an increased demand for healthy, sustainable diets, with a focus on reducing traditional meat products such as beef and chicken.

A recent study found that over seven million adults in the UK follow a meat-free diet and a further six million intended to shift to vegetarian or vegan diets. Meat-free diets were most prevalent among those aged 18-23. Most existing studies on attitudes to alternative proteins focus on adults; this new research fills an important gap in shifting the attention to [children](#) as important and influential consumers.

Although the consumption of [insects](#) as food is relatively new to the UK, it is practiced by two billion people globally, particularly in Asia, Latin America and Africa. They are increasingly being sold across the EU. In the UK, the Food Standards Agency is currently assessing house crickets for human consumption.

Plant-based proteins are now popular products at supermarkets in the UK, promoted on the basis of their environmental sustainability in comparison to other livestock sectors, as well as their high nutritional value.

Provided by Cardiff University

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