Hopping to Grocery Store Shelves Near You - Crickets!

While most Americans don't typically turn to insects when looking for their next dose of protein, this could be changing soon, as cricket-based products are slowly finding their place in the U.S. marketplace. With a quick Amazon search, you'll see that you can easily click your way to a door step-delivery of a variety of cricket-based cuisine. Think whole roasted crickets - with flavors like "spicy cayenne pepper", "hickory smoked peppery bacon" and "cheesy ranch" or maybe you'd be more interested in a cricket flour-based protein bar that is “banana bread-” or “blueberry-vanilla”-flavored? These delectable delights are locally available now too! At least two San Antonio H-E-B stores carry cricket products, as do other H-E-B stores around the state.

Throughout history, people around the globe have eaten insects, not merely out of necessity, but for enjoyment as part of their local food culture. Currently, it is estimated that insects are included in the diets of 2 billion people, worldwide. While beetles are the most commonly eaten insects in the world (31% of total insects consumed), crickets are common too (lumped in with grasshoppers and locusts at 13%).

Why Crickets?
Crickets are marketed as an environmentally-friendly, sustainable protein source. They emit fewer greenhouse gases and less ammonia than cattle or pigs and don't need as much land and water as beef cattle. They reproduce rapidly, reach their adult stage quickly, and are an efficient food source, since 80% of the live cricket weight can be consumed. Crickets stand strong nutritionally, as well: 100 g (3.5 oz) of crickets provide 120 kcal and 8 to 25 grams of protein. Cricket protein is considered a "complete protein", as it contains all the amino acids that we must obtain from our food. Crickets also contain chitin, a nitrogen-containing carbohydrate that makes up the cricket’s exoskeleton and exists as a prebiotic fiber (a fiber that "feeds" the "good bacteria" in your gut). Crickets are versatile too. While many Americans may be cringe at the thought of popping an insect in their mouths, crickets can also be ground and sold as flour, composed of 60% to 75% protein and 7% to 20% fat.

While cricket and insect-based products have been available online and in specialty restaurants and retail shops for some time, H-E-B is among the first major retailers to sell such products. One of the reasons that H-E-B went with Aspire Group crickets (sold under the brand “EXO”), is that the crickets are harvested locally, in Austin, Tx. At the time of this writing, one 1-serving pack (5 oz) of whole roasted crickets will run your $2.99 at your local H-E-B and will give you 70 calories, 4.5 grams fat, 1 gram of carb, and 6 grams of protein. Interesting to note, this one serving provides 150% of the Daily Value for Vitamin B12. A Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Cricket Protein Bar costs the same ($2.99) and will give you 220 calories, 10 grams of fat, 25 grams of carb and 16 grams of protein.
The successful sale of crickets (and other insects) in the mainstream marketplace remains to be seen, especially as more research on the nutritional and environmental impacts of insect-harvesting and consumption evolves. While technology exists to measure the quantity of specific nutrients in crickets (and other insects) there’s a knowledge gap when it comes to seeing and understanding the real and complete health effects of cricket protein. At this point, there are no controlled studies evaluating what happens when people make the switch from animal and/or plant protein over to insect protein. There’s also more that needs be known about the absorption and utilization of nutrients from insects and food safety concerns. However, regardless of what the research tells us, most of us will have to get over the “yuck factor” of eating bugs for this budding new industry to develop. If you have further questions about novel protein sources, or any other nutrition-related matter, be sure to set up a nutrition assessment with Campus Recreation’s registered dietitian nutritionist, Annie Bell. Appointments are individualized and last about an hour – oh, and they’re free! Follow the prompts here to register: https://campusrec.utsa.edu/nutritionregistration

References:
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