**Integrating Sustainable Food in School Systems**

Food. It’s on the curriculum (in science, geography, and design technology). It’s in our dinner halls. It’s in our playgrounds. It’s in our staffrooms. Food is everywhere. Delicious, nutritious, and perhaps even a little bit naughty. Food also tells a story; a story about a global supply chain that is under threat.

Springmann *et al*. (2018a) note that, with the world population growing, by 2050 the planet will no longer being able to support humanity. With more mouths to feed, combined with an increase in unpredictable weather patterns increasing soil degradation and pest infestation, harvest yields are lowering. In this context our food systems are in crises. However, it has been suggested that one way to reduce this environmental impact is through dietary change, specifically by reducing the amount of vertebrate animals on the menu – usually chicken, pork, beef and lamb in the UK (Springmann et al., 2018b). Whilst we have seen a rise in vegetarianism and veganism, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (UN FAO) have recognised an alternative diet – one which requires considerably less energy and water to farming traditional meats, yet provides equal, if not greater nutritional value. This diet is one that includes edible insects. The UN FAO have urged the West to adopt the practice of eating insects as a sustainable food source (van Huis *et al*., 2013).

While two billion people regularly eat insects as part of their diet (Jones, 2020), it is less common in the West and work needs to be done to address the misconceptions surrounding entomophagy (the practice of eating insects). Working with primary schools in Wales, I went to find out whether there was a taste for bugs and how we can embed more sustainable food into our schools.

The research found that young people are open to trying edible insects, even when their initial reaction is more ‘yuk’ than ‘yum'. This acceptance does come with some conditions: no parts of insects should be visible; information about the insects is essential. Pupils want to know how they are farmed, how they are slaughtered and be reassured that they are not only nutritionally beneficial and more sustainable than other meat alternatives, but they won’t make pupils ill. After workshops with entomologists and food developers from Bug Farm Foods, pupils were found to be so positive about eating insects, in the form of a new product called VEXo, that the Local Authority planned to put it on the regular school lunch time menu.

Teaching about food, where it comes from, the impacts it has on people and place is important if we are to support young people in thinking about sustainability. But we can’t leave it there. Knowledge and no action can leave young people in a state of eco-anxiety as they wrestle with the immensity of the issues compared to the size of the steps we are taking to address the problems. School is a perfect space to put knowledge into action. Here we have the opportunity to integrate a systems approach where pupils learn about the issues in the classroom, but then have the opportunity to choose sustainable lunches in the dinner hall, buy sustainable snacks at break time and see staff enjoy sustainable treats when they get to the end of the day.

For a more detailed review of this research see: Jones, V. (2020). ‘Just don't tell them what's in it’:Ethics, edible insects and sustainable food choice in schools, *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(4), 894-908.

For ideas of how to use edible insects in food technology check out Bug Farm Foods for ingredient and recipe ideas: <https://www.bugfarmfoods.com/>

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