

INSECTS AS A MEANS OF ENDING WORLD HUNGER AND ANIMAL SLAVERY

By Walter L. Williams October 29, 2007

In the past year I have become aware that there is a way to help end world hunger, and it is right under our noses. The major source of protein in the human diet of the future, I predict, will be insects.

Insects as a source of food would never have occurred to me if I had not lived for a year in a small farming village in northeast Thailand. When I was there, doing research as an anthropologist, I was surprised to learn the extent to which the local Isan villagers eat insects. At first, I was squeamish about biting down on grasshoppers and swallowing ants, but after getting used to them I found them to be quite nutritious. Silkworms are particularly tasty.

After investigating this subject and reading the few publications on this tragically ignored topic, I have come to the conclusion that insects represent the absolutely greatest potential resource for reducing world hunger in the twenty-first century.

Insects have very high protein levels, with hardly any fats or unhealthy substances. Insects are the most common life form on the planet. There are more ants in the world, alone, than members of all other species put together. In short, there are so many insects that every human could subsist entirely on them without any danger of extinction of those species. In fact, if humans ate more insects, there would be less need to poison the environment with chemicals designed to kill them. We would win on both counts.

Of course, many people are not comfortable putting a bug in their mouth, and there is a strong need for sanitary means of production. I feel that the best potential is to establish local industries to collect or raise insects, grind them into a powder, and then use it as a high-protein supplement to mix in with baked grains and other plant foods. Insects are not only a source for human food, but also they are a major part of the natural diet for chickens, turkeys, ducks, fish, and other sources of human food.

Incorporating insect-eating into anti-hunger campaigns is an important part of a larger strategy that I would like to suggest: to persuade people to "eat small" rather than "eat big." Eating big animals like cows causes many ecological problems. For the first time in history, due to a massive increase in beef consumption, there are more cows in the world than there are people. Not only does the current vast increase in the number of cows contribute significantly to deforestation, as more trees are cut down to make pastures for cows, but as cows digest grasses they burp methane. This vast increase in methane gas rises to the upper atmosphere and contributes greatly to the destruction of the ozone layer. Thus, after fossil fuels, cow overpopulation is a major factor in global warming.

Instead of eating big animals like cows and pigs, people would cause much less environmental damage (and would be healthier) if they ate more plant foods, combined with protein from insects, fish, chickens, turkeys, and other small animals. Milk and cheese produced from small animals like goats has much less impact on the environment than milk coming from cows.

Besides environmental issues, there are also moral considerations. To me, it would be ideal if all humans became vegetarian. But, given that such a development is not likely in the near future, it is less objectionable to eat insects along with fish and fowl (which are themselves aggressive eaters of smaller animals), than to see the mass slaughter of intelligent peaceful animals like pigs, sheep, and cows. When Americans hear stories of gorillas and chimpanzees being killed for food in Africa, we are rightly repulsed. Yet, we turn a blind eye to the much more massive killings of cows, sheep and pigs right under our noses. I recommend that anyone who eats meat

should visit a commercial slaughterhouse. It is obvious that the animals are intelligent enough to realize that they are going to be killed. They scream in mortal terror as they are cruelly hung upside down with no attention to their pain. Then their throats are slit and the blood pours over their faces, while they bleed to death in great torment and agony.

Beyond the morality of killing for consumption, there is also the moral question of forcing large intelligent animals to do draft labor for the benefit of humans. In Asian villages I have seen the way water buffaloes are mistreated as they are forced to plow rice paddies, and it is repugnant. To me, this forced labor is no morally different than slavery. I predict in the future humanity will look back on the enslavement of animals with just as much disgust as we now feel about human slavery.

Today many international humanitarian programs attempt to lift people out of poverty by supplying them with free cows, buffaloes, donkeys and oxen to plow their fields. Imagine a program like these existing two centuries ago, to assist poor white people by providing them with free African slaves to till their crops. What would we today think about such an organization, even if the group's motives were genuinely trying to help alleviate poverty among poor people? What will the future opinion be of today's programs that expand animal slavery by providing draft animals for humans to exploit for humans' own benefit?

Two centuries ago, slavery was widespread throughout the world. Male dominance over women was pervasive. Yet, as we enter the 21st century, most people realize that oppression on the basis of race and gender is no longer acceptable. Humanity has progressed beyond glorifying such oppression. It is time for us, if we know what is good for us, to expand our moral consciousness to the intelligent mammals that are today living and dying in enslaved oppression. The failure to make these changes, especially with deforestation and methane gas resulting from the cow population explosion, is literally destroying our environment right before our eyes.

Shifting food consumption to insects instead of intelligent mammals not only makes sense for ecological reasons, but it will also be another great moral advancement for humanity. I pray for the day when "moral values" issues will include attention to the suffering of our fellow mammals whom we have enslaved for our own selfish benefit. If we truly want to make the world a better place in the future, we have to grow beyond ecological destruction and humancentrism. Turning to insects as our major source of protein is a long-ignored solution to both of these problems.

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