# UK edible insect industry aims to overcome stigma and regulations for sustainable future



Over 100 investors, farmers, producers, and researchers gathered at the University of Nottingham’s Sutton Bonnington campus to explore the emerging industry of edible insects, a sector proponents promote as a sustainable and nutritious future for farming and protein consumption. The event, held recently in the Hive building, brought together experts and entrepreneurs from around the globe to share innovations and discuss the challenges faced by the industry, particularly the regulatory hurdles and cultural perceptions in the UK.

The conference was hosted by the UK Edible Insect Association (UKEIA), an organisation dedicated to developing and supporting the edible insect sector. Dr Nick Rousseau, the association’s managing director and founder, described the event as a “really good turnout” with an international mix of attendees, including participants from Africa and Taiwan. He explained to Nottinghamshire Live that despite their passion, those involved in edible insect production must overcome a significant hurdle linked to consumer prejudices. “I'm a bit of a foodie and a psychologist by background, so I find it really interesting that people have these preconceptions that it’s like it is in 'I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here,' and they have done a lot of damage to us,” Dr Rousseau said. “I get people to try these products and often they are blown away as they expect it to be disgusting.”

Among the exhibitors was Nahla Mahmoud, founder of The Insect Cafe based in Edinburgh, Scotland's first culinary venture specialising in insect-based foods. Mahmoud presented a range of innovative products such as mealworm chocolate, cricket cakes, almond cricket brownies, mealworm lava balls, and cricket muffins. She shared her journey with the publication: “We are the first food tech company there making everyday foods with insects, we turn them into flour and then we bake with the flour. Then we can make some wholesome cakes, then we also use them in their whole form, where we roast them, season them and put them on cakes or use them as croutons. We also use them as chocolate.” Mahmoud highlighted the naturally nutty and earthy taste of insects and emphasised the health benefits she discovered while incorporating them into her post-workout diet as a long-distance swimmer. “I think that once people try it, it will change their minds, as it just has so many benefits,” she added.

Another start-up focusing on fitness nutrition was Hop Bars, which develops protein bars and powders based on crickets. Geoffrey Knott, co-founder of Hop Bars, told Nottinghamshire Live about the nutritional advantages of insect-based products: “We really wanted a product that was highly nutritious and sustainably produced. Don't get me wrong—I love a steak and a bit of chicken, yet when we looked for a more sustainable and healthy alternative, we landed on this.” Knott further detailed the nutritional richness of dried crickets, noting they contain twice the protein found in steak, more calcium than milk, more iron than spinach, more vitamin B12 than salmon, and more fibre than brown rice, calling them “a superfood”.

Despite the innovative products and growing enthusiasm within the industry, delegates at the conference highlighted that consumer stigma and UK food regulations remain significant obstacles. While edible insects have been consumed in many cultures worldwide for hundreds of years, strong cultural perceptions and governmental restrictions in the UK have limited their market presence. The Food Standards Agency currently allows only temporary approvals, and regulatory uncertainty continues to delay the sector’s growth. Brexit was mentioned as a factor that has complicated the progress of edible insects in the UK, with the European Union moving forward during the referendum period to approve insects as food, putting the UK behind in regulatory developments.

Experience at the event indicated that taste might be the least of the industry’s challenges. After sampling various baked goods, protein bars, mincemeat, and seasoned roasted insects, the author of the Nottinghamshire Live report was pleasantly surprised by the flavour, describing the insects as “crunchy, nutty, bite-size animals” and “delicious,” even while initially sceptical. The main barrier was identified as the existing governmental red tape, compounded by lingering cultural resistance.

As the UK industry continues to grow and evolve, entrepreneurs and industry advocates at the University of Nottingham event remain hopeful that regulatory frameworks will adapt to support wider adoption of edible insects, recognising them as a promising source of sustainable, nutritious protein for future generations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/science/schools-centres-and-institutes/food-systems-institute/news-and-activities/news/uk-edible-insect-association.aspx> - This URL corroborates the event held at the University of Nottingham’s Sutton Bonnington campus hosted by the UK Edible Insect Association (UKEIA), highlighting the focus on farmed insect protein and the international mix of attendees mentioned by Dr Nick Rousseau.
2. <https://www.newprotein.net/news/grub39s-up-edible-insect-craze-swarms-uk-as-industry-conference-approaches> - This source supports the details about the UK edible insect industry's growth, the conference's purpose, the involvement of entrepreneurs, and the challenges including regulatory and cultural hurdles.
3. <https://www.feedandadditive.com/uk-sees-growing-interest-in-insect-protein-sector/> - This URL provides information on the increasing interest in insect protein in the UK, referencing the upcoming Nest 1.0 conference and the expanding membership of the UK Edible Insect Association.
4. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/global/partnerships/featured/adelaide-nottingham-alliance/research-themes/case-studies/putting-insects-on-the-menu.aspx> - This page supports the point about research into the sensory properties, taste, and consumer acceptance of edible insects, which aligns with the article’s note on taste being less of a challenge than cultural perceptions.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-65352497> - This BBC news article documents the UK edible insect sector's developments, consumer attitudes, and regulatory environment, supporting claims about consumer stigma, regulatory hurdles, and the nutritional value promoted by entrepreneurs like Nahla Mahmoud and Geoffrey Knott.
6. <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/novel-foods> - This official Food Standards Agency page details the UK regulatory framework around novel foods, including edible insects, confirming the issues around temporary approvals and regulatory uncertainty highlighted as obstacles in the article.
7. <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/local-news/ate-crickets-farmed-insect-protein-10131984> - Please view link - unable to able to access data