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The future of food

Why, you might ask, should our diets change in the future? What's wrong with diets today? The fact is, meat is a staple source of protein in Western countries today but that could all change in the future given the fact that prices are rising. People have been used to relatively cheap meat in recent years but due to increases in the price of cereals used to feed livestock, things will need to change. In fact, the idea of a meat substitute has been investigated in labs all over the world for years now.

One possibility is insects, or mini-livestock as they could be termed in the future. Insects are already part of the diet of many people around the world. In Japan wasps are a delicacy and locusts are popular in Africa. The great thing about insects is that they are in plentiful supply, they cost much less to raise than cattle, require less water and contain as much protein as meat does. The problem, however, is their appearance – especially to Westerners who are a bit squeamish about it. But the good news is that insects will probably be ground down into insect burgers and sausages to make it more acceptable and work is being done in this field at the moment.

Another possible alternative protein source could be meat grown in a laboratory. In-vitro meat, the content of which can be changed to contain more protein or less fat, has already been produced in the lab using cow stem cells. In fact, last year, the first ever hamburger made from this lab-grown meat was cooked for an audience on the internet and tasted by a chosen few. Those who did try it said it was edible but a bit dry and bland. Back to the drawing board perhaps?

Lastly what about a bit of algae for dinner? Algae has the advantage of growing in the sea, thus freeing up farmland to grow food for an ever-increasing numbers of mouths. In addition, not only can they be eaten – they are already widely eaten in China and Japan in the form of seaweed – but they also produce oil which some airline and shipping companies are considering using in place of fossil fuels as it is a 'clean' fuel. In addition, research is being carried out on how algae can be used as fertilisers, and animal feed too – an all round miracle foodstuff?