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SCIENCE

What It Takes to Feed Billions of Farmed Fish Every Day

They're usually just given ground-up fish. One company is exploring a more sustainable alternative: maggots.

By Brian Payton and Hakai Magazine



An aerial view of fish in a cage-farming system offshore in Turkey. (Ozan Efeoglu / Anadolu Agency / Getty)

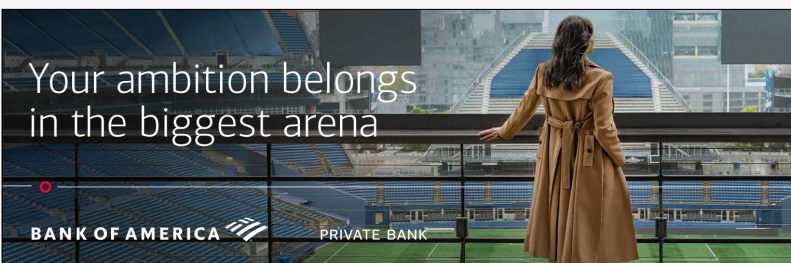
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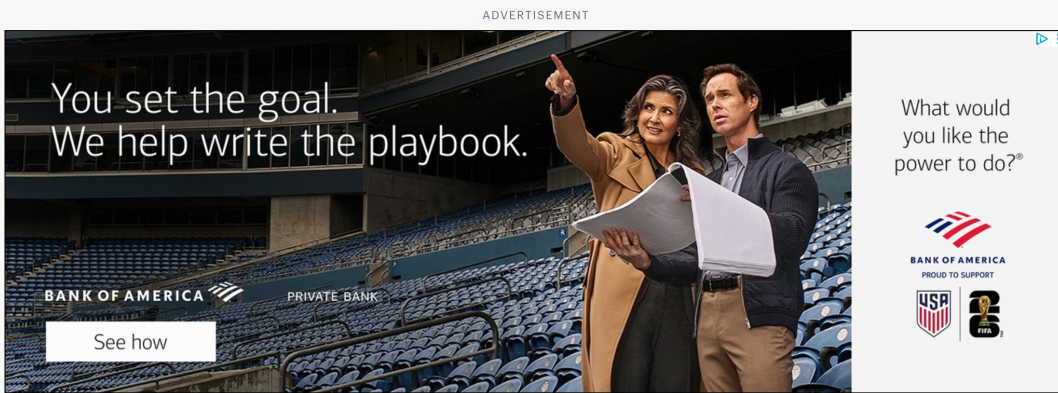
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The air inside the greenhouse is abuzz with flying insects. They rise and fall

above endless trays teeming with their larvae. Here at Enterra Feed Corporation's research facility near Vancouver, British Columbia, the farmers don't grow flowers or vegetables. Instead, they farm soft-bodied, legless consumers of decomposing matter. My guide, Andrew Vickerson, prefers that you not call them maggots.

Call them what you will; they appear to be little more than a mouth and trailing rolls of fat. Once they're past the larval (or grub) stage, during which they can grow as long as a paper clip, they metamorphose into winged adults. With their bulbous eyes, wasplike antennae, and loud buzz, the adults seem intimidating—but, lacking mouths, they can't bite or eat. They live only to mate and lay eggs for the next generation. Their entire life span is about 35 days. They are best eaten while still young.

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Vickerson waves the air in front of his face, chasing away escapees of the nearby breeding pens. He was the first employee hired by Enterra back in 2009, when he was 25. Environmentalist David Suzuki and Enterra CEO Brad Marchant (recently retired) had founded the company on a hunch. Insects play an important role in the diet of fish in the wild, they reasoned. Why not of farmed fish? While Enterra considered using other insects early on, all the research kept pointing back to a single species: *Hermetia illucens*, the black soldier fly.

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