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Students Win Prize For Making 'Power Flour' from Insects

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Different types of wheat and rye flours. Image: Mudd1

A team of business students from McGill University in Montreal have won $1-million for developing a nutritious, low-cost food made from insects.

Their new "power flour" will help feed poor people around the world.

Every year, the Hult Prize Foundation holds a contest for college and university students. They challenge the students to find ways to help solve social or environmental problems by developing new products or new businesses.

The prize was awarded on September 23 in New York City by former U.S. president Bill Clinton. Clinton chose the theme of *world hunger* for this year's contest. Ahmad Ashkar, the founder of the Hult Prize, said almost a billion people go hungry every day.
The winning team, which calls itself Aspire Food Group, developed a plan for adding dried and ground-up insects to flour to make it more nutritious.

The insects add extra iron and protein to the flour – two important nutrients that many disadvantaged people don't get enough of in their regular diets. The students call their product "power flour."

The team will use the prize money to start producing the flour. They are especially trying to help the more than 20 million "urban poor" people around the world (those who live in cities).

Although many people in the developed world don't like the idea of eating bugs, insects are commonly eaten in other parts of the world. According to a report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 2.5 billion people worldwide eat insects.

The problem with insects, however, is that they are only available a few months of the year, and gathering them takes a lot of hard work. Aspire Food Group wants to create insect farms to provide year-round access to food containing insect ingredients.

The students are researching which types of insects are eaten in different countries, and also which types of flour are most commonly used. They will make “power flour” based on popular local ingredients. For example, grasshoppers mixed with corn flour would be used in Mexico.

For now, they do not plan to introduce their flour in places where insects are not already part of the local diet.

One of the students, Gabe Mott, said people in the developed world should also consider using insects as a source of protein. He said farmed insects, or “microlivestock,” need less water, food and space to produce the same amount of food as conventional livestock like cows and pigs. They also emit fewer greenhouse gases than regular livestock.

Mott said that members of the team have eaten insects and insect-based food as part of their research. He said fried crickets taste a little like almonds, and stir-fried palm weevils are “juicy and delicious.”

But he said that when insects are mixed with other ingredients, you can’t really taste them.

In addition to Mott, the other members of the team are Mohammed Ashour, Shobhita Soor, Jesse Pearlstein and Zev Thompson.