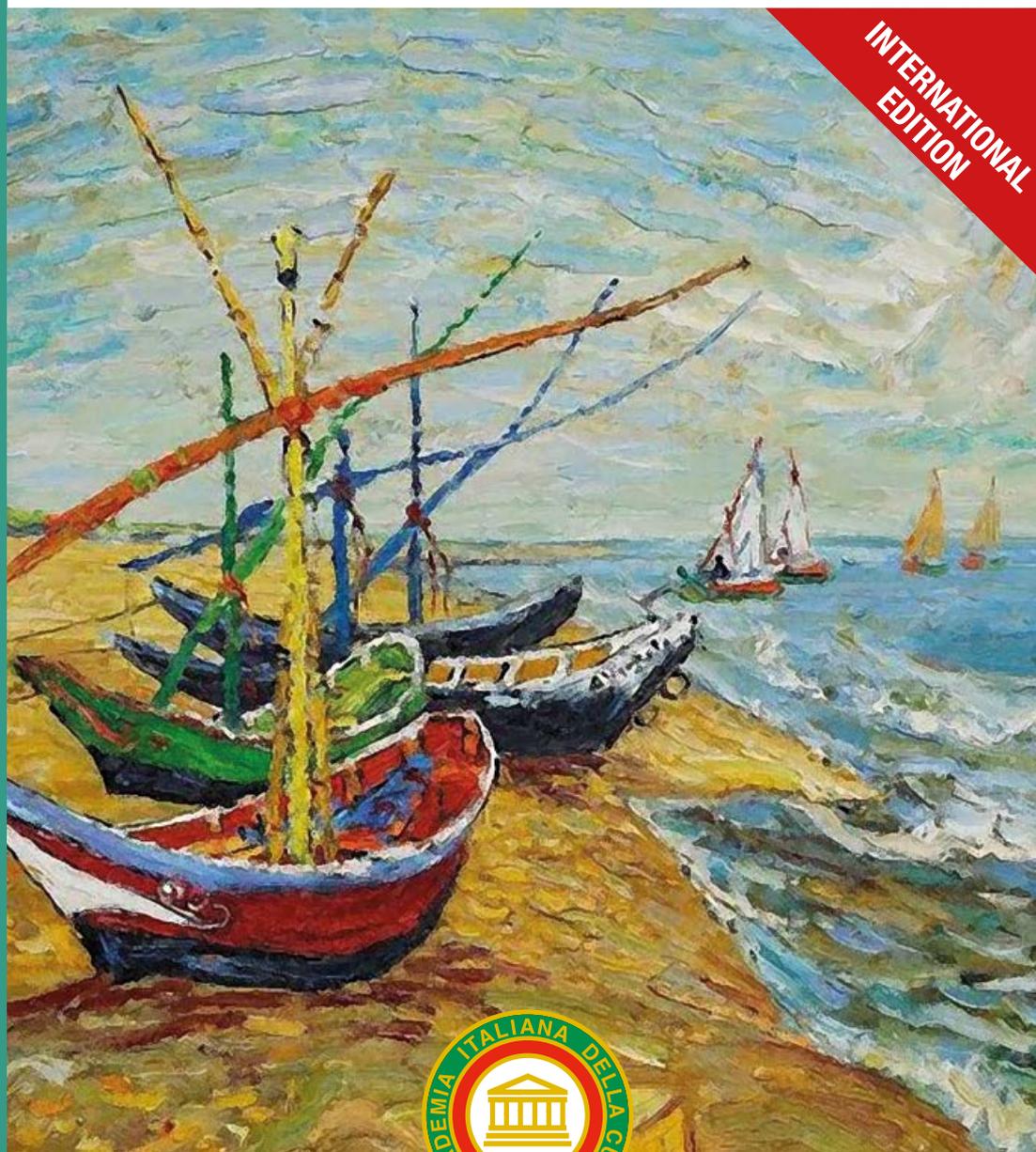


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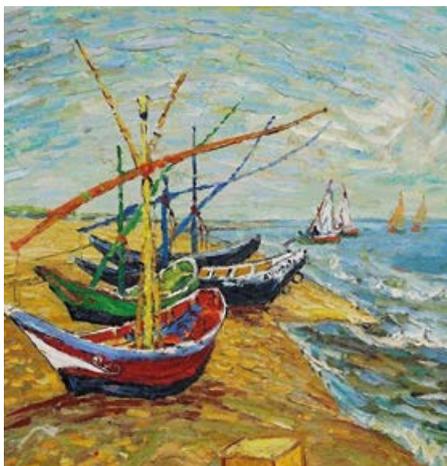
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**On the cover:** graphic elaboration of *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer* (1888) by Vincent Van Gogh; Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum

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# The Academy marks its seventieth birthday with a new Manifesto

*Guidelines for the conduct of all who care about Italian cuisine.*

**by Paolo Petroni**  
*President of the Accademia*

**D**ear Academicians: the Academy's seventieth birthday draws nigh. Only a few days remain before the 29<sup>th</sup> of July that once witnessed Orio Vergani and the other founders gathering in the Hotel Diana in Milan. That this is a strongly heartfelt anniversary is perceptible, and keenly felt, through the events marking it, the new logo created for the occasion and the numerous advance orders for the anniversary tray. Congratulations pour in from many quarters including government bodies and the Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie. A press conference will take place at the Hotel Diana, where the President's Council will meet and officially present the **Seventy-Year Manifesto** as a commemorative plaque is affixed in the dining hall.

After 70 years of striving, we consider it our duty to declare **those principles which the Academy holds fundamental** for delineating the cultural and historical domain that rightfully belongs to our cuisine. Through this Manifesto we intend, therefore, to make the public and the authorities aware of certain foundational points for protecting and developing our cuisine in Italy and abroad.

*The Manifesto's ten articles as guidelines for Academicians*

The Manifesto consists of 10 articles addressing various aspects of contemporary cuisine, which all Academicians should view

as guidelines for their conduct and their identity as essential participants in our Association.

**We now face formidable challenges and threats** to be tackled with determination and conviction. We must safeguard our true regional cuisine, the Mediterranean Diet, and food and wine tourism, while steadfastly respecting health, food safety, animals, the earth and nature. We must combat food waste, counterfeit Italian products and debased or entirely spurious 'Italian' dishes. We must acknowledge the determining role of restaurants and chefs in spearheading the evolution of culinary tastes, techniques and customs, as long as their creativity respects our cuisine's roots and ingredients rather than having no goal save to amaze or attract media attention.

*This magazine's next issue will include the Manifesto*

Finally, we advocate a food education programme not only in vocational schools but, especially, for all youngsters until the university level.

The Manifesto's decalogue is of such importance **as a guide for today and tomorrow** that we will include it in our magazine's next issue, allowing all Academicians to read and keep it. Major associations and government bodies will also receive copies.

While we wait, we bid you a Happy Academic Birthday.





# The lagoon's culinary palette

by Rosa Maria Rossomando Lo Torto  
*Venice Delegate*

*In his "Ode ai Buranelli", Orio Vergani recalls the atmosphere of the trattoria on the island of Burano where he chatted "of cooking and culture".*

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the solitude of its unsullied waters, its quiet lanes, the slow passage of its days, and the simplicity of its people, the island of Burano must have struck artists and intellectuals as the ideal place for a return to utopian innocence as they escaped civilisation in the manner of **Gauguin**.

Indeed, it was in these remote reaches of the lagoon, then on the outskirts of civilisation, that both starving young artists and affirmed painters at a creative impasse found their chosen refuge from the 1920s to the '50s, welcomed by an innkeeper and Maecenas into the rooms above his Tre Stelle (Three Stars) *trattoria* with its own vegetable garden. His extemporaneous arrangements of the day's catch and seasonal fruit and vegetables were reminiscent of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch paintings.

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*This culinary Maecenas gathered lively tablefuls of artists*

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This passionate innkeeper, **Romano Barbaro**, gathered a vivacious group of acolytes fascinated by the panorama and the human pace of life on the island; chat-



ting "of cooking and culture" over mussel soup and fried seafood, they chose to "become *buranelli*" (people of Burano) and **establish a style of painting able to evoke "the splashing of oars along the coast" and "the taste of fresh vegetables"**.

Consequently, as recounted in the elegant prose of **Orio Vergani**, the well-read journalist for *Corriere della Sera* who **was a brilliant and assiduous addition to the group**, "each morning, one studio or another would frantically busy itself **creating a still life**, with no time to retouch it, since **ere noon, Romano's lads would fetch the models back and convey them to the kitchen**. Rare fish of every colour – silver or pink, verdant, golden or mottled with coral hues – were prized both by the painters who immortalised their studied disorder on the canvas and by Romano, whose practised hand consigned them to the boiling oil. A delight for the brush, with its delicate, rapid strokes, and for the teeth; a harmony for the palette and the palate". The skilful compositions of Romano and his painters were complemented by the counterpoint of Burano cuisine, with its

*moleche* (soft-shell green crabs), *sfoglie* (soles) and *seppioline* (cuttlefish).

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*Where lay the boundary between cuisine and painting?*

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Where lay the boundary between cuisine and painting? As a cultured man who loved good food, **Vergani was won over by both Burano and Romano**, and it is recounted that it was in that very tavern that, in 1953, he hit upon the idea of entrusting the defence of our gastronomic heritage to a multitude of guardians, involving several major players in both culture and business from his hometown of Milan when founding the Italian Academy of Cuisine.

He was its first President. As a grateful tribute to Romano, whose teachings allowed his idea to take shape, and to the island where "sunflowers were the only watch I needed", he penned an affectionate "Ode ai Buranelli" (ode to the people of Burano): "fair is Burano... and its kitchens best of all!".



# The delicious *sgabeo* of Lunigiana

by **Alberto Scaramuccia**

*Researcher of La Spezia's local history*

*A delight passed through the generations, to enjoy plain or stuffed.*

**T**he land of Lunigiana is not found on maps, which merely display administrative subdivisions and not the traditions and history of the territories they portray. Customs and habits are not simply folklore but an expression of a people's very soul. And soul resides in many places, not least the kitchen.

Simple dishes from a humble region, accustomed through the centuries to frugality, necessitated not by stinginess

but by scarcity, which reveals the beauty of what may seem insignificant at first glance. Instead, at close quarters, an apparently lowly dish may reveal itself worthy of the most exalted of tables and the most discerning of palates.

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### *How to make this fried 'clump' of dough*

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**Take some bread dough**, add a pinch of salt, let it rise adequately, roll it out and cut it into strips a hand-span long. **Immerse the strips into boiling oil, retrieving them once they have puffed up** into golden, pleasantly rounded shapes reminiscent of pregnant bellies: for this is the symbolism behind rising dough and its life-giving expansion. Inevitably, as the slotted spoon raises these piping-hot, fragrant puffs of dough from the oil, your brain and stomach will conspire to make you feel the pangs of hunger, tempting you with visions of imminent ecstasy whether you've already eaten or not. But before capitulating, tarry a moment: for these luscious little sizzlers must rest on absorbent paper to shed some of their oil. Then, like a sower spreading seed, sprinkle them with fine salt.

Only now, after these brief but indispensable preliminaries, may you lunge teeth-first at these doughy delights. Down the hatch goes the first, followed immediately by another. Then, your frenzy abated, you observe your fellow diners and follow their example by **stuffing these wonky-shaped wonders with cold cuts or cheese**. Grabbing another, you look around, fearful of being judged



for your ravenous hunger. But you instantly realise that you're not the centre of attention. It's everyone for themselves: thus you, too, brandish a knife and slice open the scrumptious slab to stuff it as you see fit.

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*Filled with chocolate,  
it can even be a dessert*

---

Then, on the next round, here they are again, this time as a dessert: skip the salt and fill them with sweet cream whose first ingredient is chocolate.

The 'thing' whose preparation and consumption have been briefly described is called *sgabeo*. **In Lunigiana**, an ancient land now fragmented between eastern Liguria, northern Tuscany and south-western Emilia, ***sgabeo* is a symbol of lost unity, and is always found on festive tables throughout that land.**

It is a favourite at any party there, from village festivals to political gatherings. Above all, it is the forbidden dream of all children aged from zero to a hundred who attend such events hoping to devour it. Because the talent of *sgabeo* is to excite the gastric juices through mere expectation, a necessary prelude to the apex of gastronomic delight, analogous to anticipating a romantic rendez-vous.

Taste bud titillation is augmented by the eternal question: what shape will it assume? **Will it be long and lumpy, or a one-bite bun? And how shall I devour it: stuffed, or in splendid isolation?** The innkeeper, knowing the anxiety of those eager to gorge, offers no default solutions but presents a plethora of possibilities: **an array of cheeses, hams and other cold cuts.** More paranymp than expert, the host capably raises culinary covetousness to a fever pitch by firing up the imagination, perhaps making diners pine while the food fries, aware that the longer they remain on tenterhooks awaiting the sizzling blondes, the more fiercely will their teeth sink into them.

Never has anyone emerged unsatisfied from that riot of the senses, though satisfaction may not quench the desire for



seconds or thirds: *sgabeo*, *ça va san dire*, is no mere fling!

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*Traditionally, women  
in Lunigiana prepared it for their  
menfolk working in the fields*

---

Traditionally, women in Lunigiana prepared it for their menfolk's rare breaks while working in the fields. **They used leavened leftover bread dough and fried it in lard.** Oil, indeed, was a precious and limited commodity to be used sparingly, which is why Italian grandmothers tell us to 'add just a thread of oil'. **The same dough was also used for making small round loaves** that exhausted husbands and sons would later devour in the shade of a sturdy tree, grateful for such a substantial snack. This may be the origin of the name *sgabeo*. It sounds like *sgabello*, a stool, but **some say that it's called thus because it 'supports' a stuffing**, whether cheese or cured meat. However, I stay loyal to

an idea that imagination alone has conceived: ***sgabeo* because workers leaned against a tree while eating**, to give their weary backs a rest from the prolonged curvature of wielding sickles, hoes, billhooks and scythes.

The voracity of the field workers was not only driven by hunger but also the pleasure of eating something delicious, whether in many bites for the longer *sgabeo* or just one for its dainty round bite-sized version called *morseleto*, essentially 'morsel', possibly the earliest manifestation of *sgabeo*. **This rural, ancestral tradition**, passed from one generation to the next, became **the common property of an extended community which retained its secrets even when crossing the ocean.** Thus, travellers to Uruguay or Argentina may encounter *torta frita* among the first local specialities on offer. One glance, and the exotic mystery vanishes with a chorus of "But this is *sgabeo*!" - not a cry of disappointment caused by a failed surprise, but the joy of meeting an old friend again.

**Alberto Scaramuccia**



# Alien blue crabs

by Giancarlo Burri

Padua Academician

*From invader  
to resource?*

**D**ue to climate change and human activity, invasive organisms are increasingly colonising the Mediterranean, outbreeding native species and threatening the local ecosystems and the fisheries depending on them. Particularly alarming is the **extraordinary invasion of the blue crabs** (*Callinectes sapidus* R.).

Originating from the western Atlantic Ocean, these able swimmers have elliptical bodies up to 23 cm wide, and are recognisable by their two large lateral spines, smaller frontal spikes, long legs and intensely blue anterior meri and pincers. They live 3-4 years and can endure depths up to 35 metres, widely varying salinity levels, and temperatures of 3-35°C, thereby adapting to many environments from coasts to lagoons to estuaries.

*They devour legions  
of gastropods, bivalves, small  
crustaceans and juvenile fish*

**Practically predator-free**, they perpetrate unchecked massacres of gastropods, bivalves (mussels, clams, cockles, oysters), small crustaceans (crabs, shrimp), the small fry of many fish, and worms and jellyfish, **thus endangering swathes of marine ecosystems.**

Due to its fertility, adaptability and aggression to creatures of similar or smaller size, the Atlantic blue crab is **on the list of the 100 most invasive species in the Mediterranean.**

This problem can be converted into an economic windfall, according to the FAO's **General Fisheries Commission**



for the Mediterranean; projects are afoot in several countries to train fisherfolk in selective fishing using special equipment (such as traps) and **promoting the consumption** of these crabs through awareness campaigns. Yes, because blue crabs are not only edible but **subtly delicious, concealing flesh** similar to that of spider crabs within their claws and carapaces: **in the United States**, where they are often caught, **they are considered a delicacy**, while in Chinese and Japanese restaurants they are a niche product fetching up to 150 euro per kilogramme. Therefore Italy's Fishing Cooperative Alliance has asked the MASAF (Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests) to modify its Ministerial Decree on species for commercial fishing by adding the blue crab.

Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that in 2021, Mariscadoras, a startup created by five women from Rimini, launched the Blueat sustainable fishing project calling for better management of invasive marine species: it encourages Italian fisherfolk to harvest blue crabs (using eco-friendly systems) by offering to buy their entire catch from the Adriatic and Ionian seas at a predetermined price, to be sold to restaurants or processed for export.

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*Some regional recipes  
using our own sturdy  
'home-grown' crabs*

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**While we await this new resource's entry into our culinary canon**, let us draw inspiration from several regional recipes for our sturdy 'home-grown' crabs. The **warty, or yellow, crab** (*Eriphia verrucosa* F.), known in Italy as *favollo*, is among the fiercest, most belligerent coastal crabs. With mighty claws and a robust heart-shaped carapace over 10 cm wide, it is the starring ingredient in a dish from Livorno called *penne al grancio* (*sic*; penne with crab). Lightly fry garlic and a little spicy pepper in a wide pan; add some tomato pulp and then the whole *favolli*. Cook for about 20 minutes; remove the crabs, cut them into large pieces, add



them back into the sauce and add oil in which sage has been gently sautéed. Add the penne after cooking them *al dente*, stir to mix the flavours, and serve, garnishing with minced parsley.

A delicious first course from **Abruzzese cuisine**, *li taccune nghi li pilus*, features rhomboid fresh pasta made of durum wheat, water and salt, served with large pieces of crab cooked in tomato sauce.

**In Naples, favollo becomes fellone** (meaning 'felon' or 'traitor', because it suddenly, treacherously pops out of its lair) and is enjoyed as *maccarune cu' range fellone*: spaghetti with a sauce made of oil, cherry tomatoes and crab. The slow and lumbering **brown or edible crab** (*Cancer pagurus* L.), *granciporro* in Italian, is also known as *dormiglione* in Italy or *dormeur* in France (both meaning 'sleepyhead' or 'sleeper') because when captured it assumes a characteristic pose with its large, black-tipped claws under its carapace, to protect its vulnerable underparts. It is not very common in the Mediterranean, where most specimens are found in the **Vene-**

**tian lagoon**. A typical recipe is *granso col rosmarin* (rosemary crab): scald two crabs in boiling water for 5 minutes, drain them, remove their shells and partially crack open their claws and pincers with a mallet, reserving the resulting juices. Lightly fry two crushed cloves of garlic in extra-virgin olive oil, preferably in an earthenware cooking pot; add the crabs, a few sprigs of rosemary, salt, pepper and 250 ml of white wine in which a tablespoonful of tomato concentrate has been dissolved. Cover, cook on a very low flame for 20 minutes, and serve with abundant bread, fresh or toasted.

Very large specimens can yield *chele in casseruola* (crab claw casserole): scald the claws for a few minutes in boiling water (flavoured with bay leaves, a couple of rosemary sprigs and a glass of white wine); drain them and break them into large pieces. In a casserole, gently fry some cloves of garlic in oil; after lowering the flame, add 4-5 knobs of butter. Add the claws and minced parsley; allow the flavours to mingle, and serve.

**Giancarlo Burri**



# Grub up!

by **Daniele Bianchi**  
*Brussels Academician*

*The food industry is always eager to introduce new foods, but European law sets limits.*

**W**idely travelled foodies may well have had the chance to sample Mexican *chapulines*, Thai *jing leed* or Brazilian *içá*. The first are **mini crickets toasted** on a *comal* griddle and seasoned with garlic, lime juice and **agave worm salt** (*sal de gusano*), which convey a bitter-spicy-salty flavour

to the finished product. The second are **Bangkok street food: crickets fried** in large woks, flavoured with Thai pepper and Golden Mountain sauce (soya beans, salt, sugar and flavour enhancer). The third are **queen ants** about 2.5 cm long, fried and served with *farofa*, a typical Brazilian accompaniment made of toasted cassava flour; in Silveiras village near São Paulo, they are covered in chocolate. The use of insects in these dishes from distant lands and food cultures **obviously piques our curiosity**. The same cannot be said for the European Commission's recent authorisation of certain edible insects in Europe.

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*Some objective data might shed light on various aspects of this matter*

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The edible insect debate has become a life-or-death issue for our culinary traditions; but objective information might shed light on a few of its aspects. Firstly, **these are not the legislators' 'impositions' or 'inventions'**. The European Commission is merely adopting the norms generated by member States and the European parliament, which protects consumers by **requiring authorisation for any 'novel food'**. Food entrepreneurs are always eager to introduce new foods that can set them aside from competitors and maximise profits; luckily, European legislators impose limits on this. For example, they define a 'novel food' as **any food not consumed in Europe to a significant degree earlier than 1997** (when the



first 'novel food' regulations arose). 'Novel foods' might be innovative, newly developed foods, or those produced using new technology or processes, or foods that are or have been habitually or even traditionally consumed elsewhere, but not within the European Union.

For instance, until a few years ago, chia seeds were unknown to European diets, as were insects. In January 2021, dried yellow mealworm (*Tenebrio molitor*) larvae and frozen, dried migratory locusts (*Locusta migratoria*) were authorised as novel foods in Europe, followed in 2022 by lesser mealworms and partially defatted house crickets (both dried and frozen). **Only the latter two, following further authorisation in January 2023, have provoked vehement reactions**, often rooted in conspiracy theories, when in reality, decades-old regulations whose principal aim is consumer protection are merely being implemented. What guarantees of transparency and food safety would we have without community-wide regulations? Or should there be limits or outright bans on the circulation or even the consumption of such foods, depriving interested foodies of free choice?

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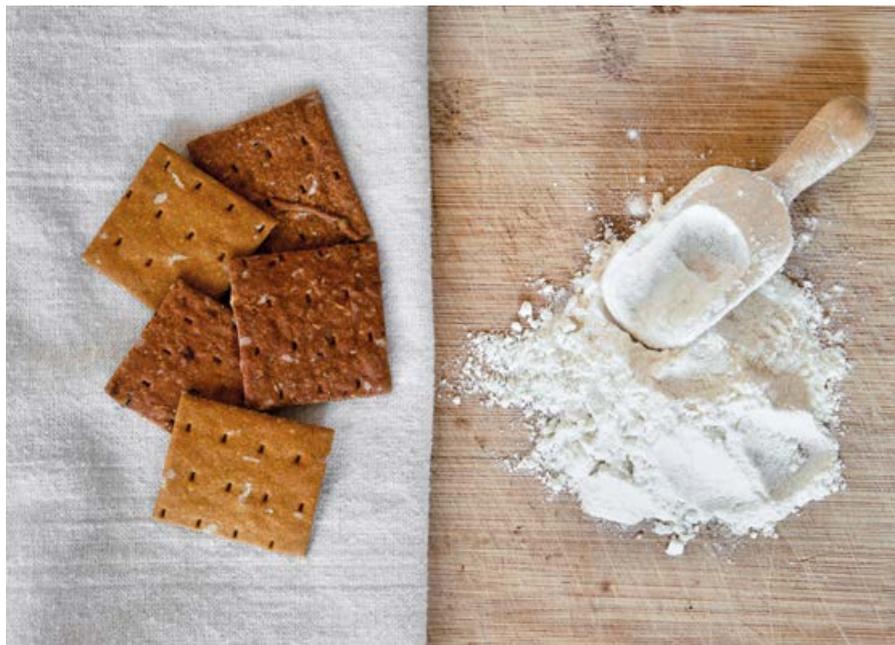
*Do these regulations completely guarantee the safety of such new products?*

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It is justifiable to wonder whether these rules guarantee the safety of such new products. This is why the law **imposes hygiene and labelling standards** for novel foods, to avoid misleading consumers.

Furthermore, if these new foods are destined to replace existing foods, that substitution must not cause nutritional disadvantages for consumers.

**Thus we should welcome labelling regulations** which not only tell us whether we are eating insects, but **protect the rights of those with allergies, vegetarians and followers of religious food rules**. We certainly won't be eating bugs unawares, unlike the average an-



nual half-kilogramme of insects that accidentally ends up in our food or **such stealthily introduced additives as insect-derived cochineal, a food colouring used for decades**.

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*For now, these will remain niche foods for two reasons*

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For now, these will remain niche foods for two reasons. Firstly, **they are very expensive** rather than being cost-efficient ingredient replacements. Time will tell whether large-scale use will make them economically viable and simpler to produce than other protein flours, as insects are subject to simpler rules (and lower costs) in terms of space, resources and animal welfare. Insect flours could whet the appetite of businesses in search of a new ingredient with 'technical features' recalling those of palm oil: odourless, tasteless, colourless, and especially, affordable; ideal as a 'filler' in thousands of processed foods. **One selling point will almost certainly be their possible ecological benefits as protein sources with a smaller 'footprint'**. For instance, kilo for kilo, beef has a 'water footprint' of 15 thousand litres of water, against 800 litres for insects.

**Insect use as animal food is far more probable** if production costs can be reduced. Insects need constant heat for survival, and insect welfare is not clearly regulated. Meanwhile, the V-Label organisation has already declared that it will deny its vegetarian logo to foods containing insects.

**Secondly, authorisation does not mean that we will all eat insects.** A new food's edibility still comes up against cultural and subjective attitudes. Most people aren't ready to eat such insects as the larvae found in *casu marzu*, and can't even contemplate eating mould or fermented foods; not by chance are insects thus far offered only ground or fried.

For now, good Italian cuisine has no need for fear. Grub tortellini, tiramisù with crickets or grasshopper pizza will remain the preserve of experimenting chefs running out of ideas and customers. As for insect flours infiltrating widely consumed foods (pasta, biscuits or other baked goods), **buyers need only be as attentive as usual** to labels, thereby avoiding ultra-processed foods which, similarly to edible insects, don't necessarily serve the cause of good food with simple ingredients and rich, natural flavours.

**Daniele Bianchi**