

Mealworm Shortage

What's behind the mealworm shortage?

By Eric Syverson

Posted: July 2, 2008, 5 p.m. EST

Making meals out of mealworms has been tough lately.

Nationwide, major companies producing or selling *Tenebrio molitor* are limiting new orders or halting them altogether. It's creating a pinch some herpkeepers are feeling online and at the local pet store.

Production issues appear to be main culprit. Fred Rhyme, owner of Rainbow Mealworms, said his worms have been dying when they're young. Once the chitinous insects get big, however, they do fine.

In business for more than 50 years, Rhyme said it's the first time he's encountered this problem. Unsure what is causing his mealworms to die, he said it might be the grain in which he keeps the insects. "We're testing everything," he said. "I'm trying different grains from different granaries."

Whatever the cause, Rhyme said he's more than 200 million worms behind in his orders, yet he hoped production would be back to normal by late July. "We'd better," he said, "or I'm out of business."

Companies experiencing production issues appear to be few, but the problem has had a trickle-down effect on other mealworm suppliers. Obviously, those buying directly from businesses such as Rainbow Mealworms are feeling the pinch, and other mealworm producers have encountered more demand than their current stocks can handle.

Yet some companies are using the shortage to remind herpkeepers that mealworms are rarely their only option for feeder insects. Todd Goodman, general manager of Timberline Live Pet Foods, said crickets are a great protein substitute. "In most cases crickets are not a new part of certain diets but only take a larger role during limited mealworm availability," he said. "Continuing to feed other foods to attempt to maintain a well-rounded diet still remains very important."