

Some Companies Are Experiencing Mealworm Production Issues

Finding mealworms has been tough lately for pet owners.

By Eric Syverson

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Cockatoos, like to peel a mealworm like a banana to enjoy as a tasty and treat. Mealworms are a good source of protein and serve as a good treat for birds.

Nationwide, major companies producing or selling *Tenebrio molitor* are limiting new orders or halting them altogether. It's creating a pinch some pet owners are feeling online and at the local pet store when trying to find mealworms for their pet bird.

Production issues appear to be the main culprit. Fred Rhyme, owner of Rainbow Mealworms, said his mealworms 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 mealworms 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 pet owners 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."