

# 60 SECONDS WITH AN ENTREPRENEUR...

## THOMAS FARRUGIA

**Role:** CEO and Founder

**Company Name:** Beta Bugs

**Sector:** Agri-Food

**Founded** 2017

**Base:** Easter Bush Campus, Roslin,  
Midlothian

**Purpose:** Develop and distribute breeds  
of Black Soldier Fly for insect farmers



**Tell us a bit about your business?** Beta Bugs is an insect genetics company that provides insect farmers with high-performance Black Soldier Fly breeds. The farmers grow the larvae on food waste to produce a local, sustainable and high-quality protein source for the animal feed sector. Recent world events such as the War in Ukraine really show we need this kind of protein, since it makes the agri-food supply chain more resilient.

**How did you come up with your business idea?** I was always keen on insect farming and protein. After a PhD in Chemistry I joined Deep Science Ventures to look at insect protein and the supply chain. I realized there were no suppliers of genetics in the supply chain, and that genetics would have a big impact on this sector, just as it has had in our other plant and animal production systems. So we set up an insect genetics company.

**How did you come up with your business name?** Originally we aimed for Better Bugs, but it was taken at the time. We opted for Beta Bugs instead, since Beta sounds like Better, plus we were part of Beta Cohort at Deep Science Ventures.

**What's been your biggest challenge to date?** There's been a few! I guess each challenge that looms over you will seem big at the time, but they then get smaller in hindsight. A memorable one would be growing the team from 6 to 12 within a year during lockdown, all whilst moving into a bigger and larger facility for the breeding programme.

**How has SE (or any other support organisation in the Scottish ecosystem) helped you on your journey?** We've had a lot of support from the Royal Society of Edinburgh and SE strands of Unlocking Ambition, coupled with High Growth Ventures – these enabled us to relocate and grow the business here, creating 12 jobs in the process. Without this support, there's a high chance we wouldn't have been in Scotland. ZeroWasteScotland has also been very supportive by helping preach the word about insect farming and getting individuals interested – this will lead to more insect farms in the UK.

**What's been the highlight of the last year for you?** Really pushing on the commercialization process. We've been busy developing our own bio-manufacturing capability via The Multiplier, our dedicated egg-production facility, which will service demand for insect genetics in the UK and further afield since insect farming is a global industry. We have also been strengthening our agri-food network by engaging with the entire agri-food supply chain, from farmers to retailers, via trade shows, talks and direct meetings.

**What's your favourite thing about being an entrepreneur?** Being able to show up each day and encounter and manage different situations.

**What's the best thing about being an entrepreneur in Scotland?** Being able to build an agri-food company in a country which produces the UK's food. Scotland is a leader in both agricultural production and innovation.

**What's the best piece of advice you ever received?** Less haste, more speed!

**What advice do you wish you hadn't listened to?** Can't recollect any – there's always learning/nuggets of wisdom in advice received.

**What has been your proudest achievement since starting your businesses?** Building a business that people are passionate about working in.

**Is there anything on your business bucket list?** Leaving a positive and lasting legacy for our industry.

**Who's been your biggest supporter?** Family and partners (past and present), coupled with our SE Advisor, my team and the Easter Bush Campus community.

**How do you care for each other's wellbeing at work?** The key part of this is offering a flexible working environment, allowing staff to better coordinate work-life balance. We have also worked hard to build a great company culture that embraces having fun and recognizing achievement.

**How do you start your day?** Heavy Kettlebells and Yoga.

**What do you do for fun after a busy week?** Head out into the hills for some good long walks or wander into the library to pick up some science-fiction.

**What's the best business book you've read?** My favourite has to be Andy Grove's "High Output Management", closely followed by Tracy Kidder's "The Soul of a New Machine", which captures the pace of building something completely new at pace.

**Any office pets?** Bella the Production Dog!

**What's your best tip for achieving a good life/work balance?** Give yourself enough time to do the things that matter to you. Define and protect your non-negotiables. If you're losing access to them, then reset.

**What would you say is the secret to success?** Show up, be consistent and give it your best shot.

**What's your big dream?** Personal Flight, without the carbon emissions. Might need nuclear fusion first.

**How would you like to be remembered?** The human who helped put insects into people's food.

**Where can we find out more about your business?** [www.betabugs.uk](http://www.betabugs.uk) / @betabugsltd