

Say No to Pet Food Containing Any 1 of These 3 'Mash Ups'

If you want your pet to be healthy, happy, energetic and live a long life, I urge you to start demanding food without these ingredients. Also, consider being like 43% of pet owners, and pay more for food that doesn't contain this vile substance.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In the U.S., almost all pet owners (95%) consider their pets to be part of the family
- Pet owners are increasingly looking for healthier, natural pet food and treat options, and are even moving beyond expectations of "high-quality" food towards "humanized" food
- About 43% of pet owners indicated they'd pay more for non-GMO (genetically modified organisms) pet products

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In the U.S., almost all pet owners (95%) consider their pets to be part of the family, and rightly so! This is up 7% from 2007, according to the Harris Poll,¹ and trends indicate that Americans are increasingly looking for ways to give their pets the longest, happiest lives possible.

Pet food is the area of biggest spending for most parents, taking up 76% of the pet care category. The Humanization of Pet Food report released by Nielsen has also revealed some promising trends in this area, as Americans increasingly look for healthier treats, specialty pet foods and other premium options.

Further, people are moving beyond expectations of "high-quality" food towards "humanized" food. The Nielsen report explained:²

" ... [T]hey desire pet food options that address the same health concerns currently influencing human food production, such as unnatural preservatives and genetically modified ingredients — and they're serious about these preferences."

I'm annoyed our demands for better-quality commercially available pet food have been deemed the "humanization" of a dirty industry that should have been called to higher standards years ago.

It's frustrating that last July at The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) meeting, an industry representative stood up and said it was absurd to hold pet food to human food standards, that the "humanization of pets" has not been good for the pet food industry, as if all of life, aside from humans, aren't worthy of clean, whole, and free-of-chemical food.

Wake up, AAFCO! This isn't the "humanization of pet food," this is an entire generation of pet owners demanding transparency from the industry. Let's be clear here: we aren't anthropomorphizing.

We want edible, untainted, healthful, and free-of-chemical food that's clearly labeled as such so we know exactly what we're buying. For us. For our pets.

Pet Owners Are Seeking Natural, Non-GMO Pet Foods

Pet owners are increasingly demanding better-quality food for their pets, and if history is any indication, these positive trends may force some pet food makers to clean up their acts. Among health claims on pet foods, those boasting no genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were most sought after.

About 43% of pet owners indicated they'd pay more for non-GMO pet products. Further, while consumers once flocked to pet foods that were supposedly backed by "science" (many products of which are disasters for your pet's health), they're now looking for natural products. According to Petfood Industry:³

"While consumers once trusted science to deliver the magic mix of vital nutrients for their pets, they're putting more faith in nature these days. Just as with their own food choices, consumers increasingly prefer pet foods made in a kitchen over those made in a lab."

Also of note, the Nielsen report revealed that 85% of pet owners believe — correctly — that their pets can live longer if they feed them the right foods. In response, many are seeking healthier pet treats in lieu of what are perceived to be more "indulgent" options.

Many pet owners are also interested in fruit and vegetable chews and foods that come in soup and stew form (as opposed to the factory-made "mush" or kibble that's long been the norm).

While I have concerns many well-intentioned pet parents still end up being duped by advertising claims of what "natural," "all-natural" and "made with natural ingredients" really means, I still feel it's a step in the right direction.

People in general are trying to make better health and diet choices for the animals they care for. The industry is starting to feel some long-overdue pressure.

Pets Need to Eat Real Food Too

You're probably aware of the importance of eating real foods — grass fed meats, vegetables, fruits and the like. The same holds true for your pets, and by this definition, we should all be thankful for this trend for more "humanized" pet foods.

Your pet doesn't need to eat a mash-up of meat byproducts, moldy grains, synthetic vitamins, fillers and chemical additives pressed into bite-size pieces (via toxic processing techniques) or dumped into a can. Your pet needs real, fresh, and unadulterated food, just like you do.

The first can of "pet food" entered the marketplace roughly 100 years ago. Prior to that dogs and cats hunted themselves, scavenged, or relied on kind humans who shared their scraps.

A farm dog's diet would be supplemented with what she could find, including litters of baby bunnies, berries, grass, seeds, nuts, poop, carrion (dead things) and a variety of other plants, along with whatever she hunted or was lucky enough to scavenge (including things like placenta from a recent birth, hooves from a recently trimmed horse, etc).

Barn cats also controlled vermin populations on the farm well before "cat food" entered the market about 100 years ago. These cats took their jobs very seriously and led active lives, patrolling barns and ridding store houses of mice, moles, voles and other small prey.

They fed themselves fresh food daily, but were also thankful for a saucer of fresh cow's milk the farmer regularly offered them, as well as food scraps put out for them on occasion.

As our lives became busier and busier, we sought more convenient options for nourishing ourselves, and this "food on the go" concept was extended to pets, in the form of pre-packaged, "scoop and dump" pellets.

After all, it was annoying the farm dog hunted his own food now and then; having a ready-to-feed pelleted food to offer dogs and cats would be so easy. Making healthful meals took time, money and energy.

How nice would it be to not have our pets hunt, but also not be responsible for making food for them. And the pet food industry was born.

Although "pet food" was introduced as an added convenience for the busy adult (and a great place to recycle human food waste into pet feed), it came with a hefty price tag in terms of animal health. Animals were meant to eat fresh food. But fresh food was, and is, not convenient.

When we transitioned companion animals onto a ration of 100% processed canned and dried food, some interesting things started to happen. In the last 100 years, we've seen the dog and cat cancer rate soar; 1 in 3 cats will die of cancer, 1 in 2 dogs.

We've seen the incidence of obesity and diabetes skyrocket. As a practicing vet, I see dogs with such horrific allergies they pull skin of their bodies; it's enough to stop and say to yourself, "I understand how we got here, but how do we undo what we've done?" The best way to heal your pet's body is with food. Whole, fresh, organic, and unadulterated food (like what they were eating prior to being duped into thinking we had to buy "pet food").

To mimic an ancestral diet, the absolute healthiest food for your pet is a nutritionally balanced, raw, or gently cooked diet that you make at home. Please understand that you can't simply "wing it" when it comes to making homemade pet food (an unbalanced homemade diet can be deadly to your pet, or at best make chronic health issues worse).

That being said, if you're willing to learn how to do it right, making homemade pet food is something most pet owners can accomplish — and many come to enjoy. For more details, check out my interview with Pol Sandro-Yepes, a passionate pet lover who enjoys making his own homemade dog food (below).

You can find recipes for an ancestrally balanced, homemade raw diet in the cookbook I co-authored, "Real Food for Healthy Dogs and Cats."

[Download Interview Transcript](#)

What Are the Best Store-Bought Pet Foods?

If you don't want to deal with balancing diets at home, choosing to feed pre-balanced, commercially available raw food, is a great choice. There are many small, amazing pet food companies now offering human-grade, organic, and free-range frozen foods that can be fed raw or gently cooked. A freeze-dried/dehydrated diet is also good (although less so than fresh).

Human-grade canned food is a mid-range choice, but hard to find, followed by premium canned food. Dry foods, even higher-quality human-grade varieties, are less recommended because they are not biologically appropriate for dogs or cats.

In the video below you can see my updated list of the best and worst foods to feed your pet. If you're at all unclear about what's healthy and what's not for your pet, this is the video to watch. The basic goal is to choose foods that will most closely mimic your dog or cat's carnivorous ancestral diet.

Start by making even slight changes to your pet's diet, for instance feeding him whole foods for treats. Berries and fresh cubed meats are an excellent choice. You can also offer small amounts — no more than one-eighth-inch square for a cat or small dog and a one-quarter-inch square for bigger dogs — of other fruits (melons and **apples**, for example), as well as raw cheese.

Many cats enjoy bits of zucchini or cantaloupe. You can also try offering some sardines packed in water, free-range quail or rabbit meat to your cat. Other treat options for dogs include cubed liver or heart, fresh or frozen peas and raw almonds, cashews, and Brazil nuts (but NEVER macadamia nuts).

By feeding your pet healthier treats and moving your way up to a healthier overall diet as well, you can significantly improve his health and, likely, his lifespan. The good news is that many pet owners are moving this way already, and hopefully more pet-food manufacturers will follow suit by offering more high-quality, human-grade, and non-GMO real-food options for pets.

[Download Transcript](#)

Sources and References

[Pet Food Industry March 9, 2016](#)

^{1,3} [Pet Food Industry March 9, 2016](#)

² [Nielsen March 7, 2016](#)
