

# The Ugly Truth Pet Food Companies Won't Divulge

Commercial pet food companies are beginning to think they should share more of their top-secret information with consumers and not sugarcoat reality because other online information sources may reveal it first. But if they do share these unsavory truths, would pet owners still buy their food?

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Ultraprocessed pet food manufacturers realize many pet parents no longer trust them, and so the topic of transparency has become a focal point for industry insiders
- The seemingly insurmountable challenge these companies face is that full transparency about their ingredient sourcing and manufacturing processes could potentially destroy their profitability
- For example, most consumers would be horrified to learn the realities of the pet food rendering industry
- There are a variety of fresh and minimally processed commercial diets made by truly transparent companies that are much healthier alternatives to ultraprocessed pet food

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Arguably the most important key to the success of the ultraprocessed pet food industry is its marketing savvy. Poor quality, biologically inappropriate, ultraprocessed pet food products are marketed to make them appear as the most wholesome, nutritious food you can offer your cat or dog.

The bad news for the industry is that a growing number of pet parents have become suspicious that there's a link between processed diets and the compromised health of their animal companions. This consumer awakening — coupled with frequent pet food recalls for potentially deadly contaminants like aflatoxins the euthanasia drug pentobarbital, and nutrient deficiencies and excesses — has the processed pet food industry scrambling to reposition itself.

Industry insiders are talking a lot lately about "transparency," "not hiding reality," and sharing information with the public so they "don't seem like they are hiding anything."<sup>1</sup>

## Hiding the Realities of Ultraprocessed Pet Food

According to Henriette Bylling, CEO of the Denmark-based Aller Petfood Group, to accomplish transparency, pet food companies must become less selfish as brands.

*"We can't hide reality," Bylling told an audience of pet food industry professionals. "Reality cannot always be sugarcoated and that's what we have to admit to. We shouldn't always share information and make marketing with the sole purpose of sales, sales, sales. We should also share knowledge."*

*Yes, I understand it makes one vulnerable. We have to open up about some of the top-secret information. It is a bit scary, I understand. But it's important, because if we don't open up about it, and they find out in other ways, they are losing trust in us. Not us as a company, but potentially in the whole trade.”<sup>2</sup>*

Bylling went on to say that pet parents crave more information about the food they purchase for their dogs and cats, because choosing which brand and variety to buy entails a complex decision-making process. So far, so good, but then she seems to lose the plot when she points out that nowadays, “bloggers, online forums, trend promoters and others” compete with veterinarians, pet food companies and retailers to inform the purchase process.

Not that long ago, only a handful of people and companies were able to offer advice on what to feed pets — no matter how ill-informed, sales-focused, and non-transparent those sources were. Bylling laments that consumers now have more resources to choose from and they “fail to assess whether the information is correct, biased or absolutely flawed.”

Indeed, in the sea of online information, pet guardians need to do enough research to know they are educating themselves with correct information, including understanding the massive quality control issues with **“feed-grade” pet food** the industry does not want disclosed or discussed.

Thus far, many veterinarians, pet food companies and retailers continue to provide incorrect, biased and flawed nutritional advice to pet parents, including the health-damaging recommendation to feed only one brand of highly processed pet feed for a lifetime.

The whole point of beginning the transparency discussion is to highlight the lack of participation by the ultraprocessed pet food industry and how it’s destroying consumer trust. Bylling then returns to her original point:

*“So, I believe we as a trade, we need to be able to balance out the information on the internet, so they [pet parents] can gain an insight into what's actually going on ... You don't want the consumer to find out.*

*You want to be able to say it ... Say what you do and do what you say. You don't need any more tips than that.”*

## **Can Big Pet Food Be Transparent and Stay in Business?**

While I appreciate the general sentiment that pet food companies should share more information with consumers and not hide the reality of their products, the fact is, if 90% of companies were to do that, it’s very likely they would see their sales numbers plummet.

Here’s the ugly reality pet food companies can’t afford to be transparent about: the vast majority of ultraprocessed commercial pet food — including premium brands and so-called “prescription” and “therapeutic” diets — are made from rendered ingredients.

The following is a description of the type of raw product pet food renderers deal in, from a 2004 report to Congress:

*“Renderers annually convert 47 billion pounds or more of raw animal materials into approximately 18 billion pounds of products. Sources for these materials include meat slaughtering and processing plants (the primary one); dead animals from farms, ranches, feedlots, marketing barns, animal shelters, and other facilities; and fats, grease, and other food waste from restaurants and stores.”<sup>3</sup>*

Renderers drive around in specially designed trucks picking up dead farm and ranch animals, as well as dead pets from animal shelters. They also collect fat, grease and other human food waste from food outlets that goes into pet food.<sup>4</sup>

The rendering process involves combining the raw product described above in huge containers, grinding the mixture down to chips or shreds, then cooking it at 220° to 270°F for up to an hour, which separates the meat from the bone.

The grease, also called tallow, rises to the top, is skimmed off the mixture, and often becomes the mystery “animal fat” frequently found on pet food ingredient labels. The remaining product is put in a press that squeezes out all the moisture and pulverizes the material into a powder. Shaker screens are used to separate excess hair and large bone chips from the powder. The result is meat and bone meal added to pet food formulas.

Pet food advocate Susan Thixton has been reporting the realities of the processed pet food industry for years at her site, [TruthAboutPetFood.com](http://TruthAboutPetFood.com). If you have the stomach for it, you can view pictures of rendering [\*\*facilities here\*\*](#) and [\*\*here\*\*](#).

## More Big Pet Food ‘Top-Secret’ Information

Extrusion is a process that has been used by the pet food industry for decades. About 95% of dry pet diets are manufactured using this process.

Batches of dog or cat food ingredients (including meat and bone meal from the rendering process described above) are mixed, sheared and heated under high pressure, forced through a spiral shaped screw and then through the die of the extruder machine. The result is a ribbon-like product called extrudate that is knife-cut and dried.

The high temperature used in extrusion (up to 400°F) and the short time frame to process (under 5 minutes) creates continuous chemical and physical changes to the ingredient mixture.

These changes include starch gelatinization, inactivation of nutritionally active factors, protein denaturation, and vitamin loss (which is why so many of the items on dry pet food ingredient lists are vitamins that must be added back in after the manufacturing process destroys all the nutrition in the food).

Further, when pet food ingredients are repeatedly processed at high temperatures, terrible things happen to the food, including chemical reactions that create Advanced Glycation End products (AGEs) when protein and carbs are heated together, and Advanced Lipoxidation End products (ALEs) when fats are heated.

I interviewed AGEs expert Dr. David Turner for our upcoming book and he relayed that a lifetime of highly processed food and the influx of detrimental AGEs and ALEs are harmful to every tissue in the body. From musculoskeletal disease to heart disease, kidney disease, pancreatitis, significant allergic reactions, autoimmune disease, and cancer, it's no wonder we're finally waking up to what we're feeding our pets.

Not ironically, the list of problems AGEs incite in the body is the same list of reasons our pets visit the vet most often. Our animals are not thriving because they have 122 times higher levels of these toxic compounds than fast-food-eating humans (and cats have 38 times higher levels).<sup>5</sup>

The intense level of food processing, combined with poor quality rendered ingredients and obnoxious levels of unnecessary (but inexpensive) starchy carbs yields very convenient “fast food;” in many cases it’s the sole source of nourishment for pets.

## Big Pet Food Can’t Get There From Here

Once you understand how most ultraprocessed pet food is produced, you can see the futility of the notion of “transparency” on the part of manufacturers to combat the loss of consumer trust in their companies and products. There’s really no way they can be truthful and transparent about the pet food they produce and expect to continue to sell the stuff.

Can you imagine what their packaging would look like if they were entirely transparent about what’s in that bag or can of pet food? And what horrors would their TV commercials and online advertising reveal?

Given the sourcing of their ingredients and the way their products are manufactured, coupled with what can only be described at this point as highly deceptive marketing and advertising practices, I can’t see these companies getting from where they are to a state of “Say what you do and do what you say” transparency.

## What to Do if You’ve Lost Trust in the Pet Food Industry

Thanks to mislabeled products, deceptive marketing techniques, low-grade, biologically inappropriate ingredients, too-frequent recalls, and an exploding population of pets with chronic digestive issues, allergies and degenerative disease, it’s no wonder so many pet parents are exploring homemade diets, fresh food diets made by smaller, transparent pet food producers, raw diets (some of which are sterile) and other alternatives to dead, rendered, dubious, ultraprocessed feed-grade “fast food”.

My advice? Search this website for more information on choosing fresher, better quality diets for your pet. There are dozens of videos and articles here that can help you become more knowledgeable about pet nutrition so that you can make the best diet choices for your own dog or cat. You can also learn what real transparency in pet diets looks like by ordering the **[Truth About Pet Food 2021 List](#)**.

If you want to help change the deceptive practices occurring in the pet food industry, I recommend becoming a member of the **[Association for Truth in Pet Food](#)**, which is the only organization out there committed to holding the regulatory agencies and AAFCO accountable. You can also check this **[list](#)** for the pet food companies that have taken the ingredient transparency pledge.

## Sources and References

<sup>1,2</sup> [PetfoodIndustry.com, January 22, 2019](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Animal Rendering: Economics and Policy, CRS Report for Congress, March 17, 2004](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Food Regulation Facts](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Teodorowicz, M. et al. Front. Immunol., 13 September 2018](#)

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