

Dog Food

More than ever, people worry about what to feed their pets. The international pet food recall in 2007 made people aware of the terrible inadequacies of pet food, and worse, what pet foods could contain. As BARK Magazine Editor, Claudia Kawczynska writes, “No matter how you define it, dog food is processed food. It is manufactured, meaning that it goes through many steps before it reaches the dog’s bowl. The more steps a food takes before it is consumed, the more likely it is that a production or deliver system failure will affect its quality.”

The pet food industry continues today as a multi-billion dollar business, partly because they know that owners think buying high quality brands ensures a more comprehensive and nutritionally sound diet for their pets. The industry also preys on pet owners who feel inadequate when it comes to knowing what’s good and what’s bad for their pooch or kitty. How much protein? What kinds of grains or vegetables are good? What about vitamins and other nutrients?

And in our hectic, stressed-out life styles, picking up a can of organic food, a top-flight kibble, and treats with glucosamine-condritin make feeding our pets easier, guilt-free and safe. Or so we thought until the Canadian company Menu Foods began its recall in 2007.

So what should owners do?

First of all, know some facts.

1. FDA inspects only about 1% of the imported food it regulates (USA Today, 4/9/07).
2. Ethoxoquin is a rubber stabilizer that has become increasingly popular as a preservative with companies that make high-performance pet foods. Monsanto, the chemical’s inventor, refined it for use in animal food and companies found it cheaper than other means of extending the shelf-life of pet foods. It is linked to increased auto-immune diseases, from skin problems, to birth defects in puppies and higher rates of cancer. (www.cbc.ca/consumers/market/mp30/ethoxyquin.html)

3. Most pet food is made from the low end of the food chain: by products are parts of chickens, cows and pigs that are unfit for human (and animal) consumption: feathers, hooves, beaks, lungs, bones and ligaments, hair, and heads. Wheat gluten is a cheap, low-grade protein source. Ann Martin’s Food Pets Die For helps consumers understand the awful facts about how most pet food is made and what the terms on labels really mean.

Second, learn basic pet nutrition. Donald Strombecke, DVM, PhD and professor emeritus, UC Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine, published the first book on preparing home-cooked pet foods. Home-Prepared Dog and Cat Diets is still considered an excellent reference and introduction to the subject.

UC Davis Veterinary Teaching School Nutrition Department can advise owners on commercial foods, or recommend specially designed diets to promote a pet’s health. The staff can also formulate diets for special healthcare needs, such as weight loss, allergies, or certain diseases. One of the more common problems that nutritionists see today is grain and gluten intolerance, which can have serious consequences on a pet’s life.

http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vmth/small_animal/nutrition/default.cfm