

From the publishers of **Pet Product News**

Spring 2019

WELLNESS & NUTRITION NEWS



THE
picture
of
health

Manufacturers and retailers reveal the top trends driving the wellness and nutrition categories. (Starting on page 4)

CBD ON THE RISE

CBD/hemp products are boosting retail sales and pets' health. (page 10)

TRENDING TREATS

Manufacturers respond to the demand for high-quality ingredients and transparency. (page 14)



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Focused on Health

The pet industry is making strides in caring for pets' well-being, with new technology and ingredient trends leading the way.

THIS ARTICLE IS BROUGHT
TO YOU IN PART BY
**PHYTO
ANIMAL HEALTH**

Participants:

DR. BOB GOLDSTEIN & SUSAN GOLDSTEIN, founders of Earth Animal in Southport, Conn.

HEIDI HILL, founder of Holistic Hound in Berkeley, Calif.

IAN QUINN, CEO of Phyto Animal Health in Poway, Calif.

TODD ROWAN, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Bixbi Pet in Boulder, Colo.

SHUTTERSTOCK

PET PRODUCT NEWS: What ingredient trends are hot right now and why? And what products have you recently launched?

DR. BOB GOLDSTEIN & SUSAN GOLDSTEIN: For health: There is nothing hotter, new ingredient-wise, than cannabidiol (CBD) for animals, especially full-spectrum CBD. Earth Animal offers its own line of CBD, Natures Comfort, to help dogs and cats with pain, inflammation, anxiety and weakened immune system.

Natures Comfort CBD—Zen line to include Zen Pen, Zen Tabs and introducing Zen Mist (spray), Zen Potion (liquid) and Zen Motion (chews) at Global Pet Expo in March of this year.

Additionally, new at Earth Animal are the use of sprouted organic seeds and organic fruit and vegetable extracts included in Dr. Bob's Wisdom Dog and Cat Food and Dr. Bob's Daily Health Nuggets. Sprouted organic seeds and the extracts are high in phytonutrients, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals in their natural states. They offer superior protection and support for the immune system.

Daily Health Nuggets is a daily vitamin and mineral supplement that is rich in naturally occurring antioxidants, phytonutrients and other vital ingredients. It is food derived and does not contain any synthetic ingredients.

Also, there are new technologies offering greater bioavailability. Earth Animal has recently introduced a new process, called transdermal, to its line of CBD products. The Zen Pen, which is transdermal,

is applied to the inside of the ear flap and is rapidly absorbed through skin pores by a process called Uptake Technology. Uptake allows the CBD to go directly into the blood stream, bypassing the mouth and GI tract. In addition, Uptake Technology is also used in Zen Tabs, which is full-spectrum CBD plus Uptake plus Regen+ (an oligopeptide), which helps reduce anxiety, reduces pain and inflammation, and helps to balance the immune system and support the body in producing normal, healthy cells.

For nutrition: Earth Animal is introducing Dr. Bob's Wisdom Dog Food at Global Pet Expo, and soon to come cat food, which combines sourcing and manufacturing control, unique technology offering great nutritional bioavailability, along with sustainability practices.

This advanced technology features air drying and blending of three separated components (chicken or turkey), plus organic fruits and vegetables, plus Vitality Cubes, which contains the essential vitamins and minerals for the food to be complete and balanced. It is a food that supports the use of humanely raised meats and local farming. Earth Animal has also launched its Natures Protection line of natural flea and tick prevention products that include a flea and tick collar, a flea and tick spot-on, a shampoo and a spray, free of chemical pesticides and insecticides. Soon to come is Earth Animal's natural flea and tick powder, which is applied to the coat

and will kill fleas and ticks without using chemical insecticides.

HEIDI HILL: CBD continues to be a very popular trend in pet products and beyond, and for good reason—the reported health benefits for both humans and animals are tremendous. With the recent passage of the 2018 U.S. Farm Bill, we've opened the door to solid scientific research about the potential uses of this amazing plant.

To maximize the benefits of CBD, we have recently begun incorporating full-spectrum, water-soluble hemp oil into our products, which utilizes nano-emulsion technology for significantly increased absorption and faster symptom relief. Look for water-soluble hemp oil in our new Full Spectrum Hemp & Mushroom Soft Chews and 1,000 milligram Full Spectrum Hemp Oil, as well as our Mighty Mojo Hemp and Mushroom Oil.

In addition, we've recently incorporated ashwagandha into our new soft chews. Ashwagandha is an adaptogenic herb (promotes balance in the body) that has been used in India for centuries, offering amazing and wide-ranging health benefits. Studies in animals show that ashwagandha can promote calmness, muscle function, hormone balance and immunity, improve joint health, lower anxiety levels and more. We're very excited to incorporate KSM-66 Ashwagandha, a highly concentrated, full-spectrum ashwagandha root extract, into our new soft chews supplements, for additional health benefits.

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Holistic Hound Full Spectrum Hemp Healing Balm for dogs blends organic, full-spectrum hemp oil with 150 milligrams of CBD with essential oils, butters and other natural healing ingredients to treat a variety of conditions. Apply topically as needed to help with pain, wound care, hot spots, itching, dryness, yeast and more. It is GMO free.

Holistic Hound Full Spectrum Hemp Oil with 1,000 milligrams of CBD offers a stronger and more concentrated option for maximum health benefits. The 1,000-milligram tincture utilizes water-soluble nano-emulsion technology for increased absorption and bioavailability.

IAN QUINN: Hemp CBD and phytocannabinoid-rich (PCR) pet products are captivating to pet owners right now because of all the benefits people are reading and hearing about. From supporting healthy hips and joints for older animals to helping to maintain a calm and relaxed state during thunderstorms or fireworks, pet owners are looking for all-natural and healthy alternatives to support their loved ones without pharmaceuticals or other over-the-counter medications that have a laundry list of side effects. Hemp CBD products for pets are also a hot topic for veterinarians and animal health professionals who are fielding questions on a daily basis, many of whom recommend Phyto Animal Health for their patients in most need.

Our newest product is our high-potency 3-gram Oral Concentrate that has 510 milligrams of full-spectrum phytocannabinoid-rich hemp paste. This clinical powerhouse is absorbed through the gum line and directly into the bloodstream, bypassing first metabolism and first liver transport for higher uptake into the bloodstream. This product has the same potency per serving as our 10-gram Oral 1700-milligram Concentrate but at one-third the size and price. Later this year, we will be releasing a new oral health chew that is guaranteed to remove plaque and tartar to help maintain

healthy teeth.

TODD ROWAN: Bixbi doesn't look at "what's hot." Instead, we look at "what's right." And what's right has always been fresh, raw, gently processed ingredients. Fresh meat is right. Rendered meal powders are not right. Ingredients that enhance digestibility and nutrient absorption are right. For example, Bixbi Rawbble dry foods average 90 percent digestibility.

Bixbi's new award-winning Rawbble line of fresh meat dry foods approaches canine nutrition differently than just about everyone. We think using fresh meat instead of meal powders is simply the best option from a nutritional standpoint. Contrary to popular belief, rendered meals are not a healthy source of protein. They are over-processed and compromise digestibility. Fresh meat, on the other hand, provides much greater nutrient bioavailability. Additionally, our Rawbble freeze-dried and canned foods have some of the highest fresh meat inclusion levels in the industry. And the entire Rawbble food family is offered at prices the average consumer can afford. Dogs win, and their owners win.

PPN: How can independent pet supply retailers become trusted pet health partners for consumers?

GOLDSTEINS: Individual pet supply retailers can become trusted by their transparency with regards to personal ethics. The culture, education and healing knowledge should come first before the register transaction. Transparency facilitates trust, which is why Earth Animal is very public with how we run our business. Customers who connect with the businesses purpose are generally "lifers."

HILL: Education is key. Not only must retailers educate themselves about individual products and companies, ingredients, new trends and more, but they must also become a valued and trusted resource to help pass this education on to their customers.

We've found that education is truly a hands-on experience that requires engagement between customers and employees. Holistic Hound provides both online and in-person training to ensure that our retailers have the information they need about our products and how they work to empower and encourage

confidence in their customers. In addition to ongoing education and training, we provide a variety of collateral and POP materials to help educate consumers and help retailers sell. With so many new brands flooding the market, it is important for retailers to understand how to differentiate and select the highest-quality products that are the best fit for their customers.

QUINN: Members of the World Pet Association (WPA) and of the Independent Pet Retailer Association (IPRA) are known for having high-quality products as well as expert, knowledgeable staff. Independent pet supply retailers working with the IPRA and WPA have product management support from Mr. Checkout. The company is able to provide product feedback and opportunities, consults on industry trends and cross-platform promotions, and provide new product opportunities to distributors and wholesale retailers. That is why we partnered with Mr. Checkout as it helps us provide the educational outreach and field support available from Phyto Animal Health to the members of the IPRA. Education opportunities for retailers include learning to help pet owners choose the best hemp CBD product for their loved ones and how to compare brands based on the safety and efficacy of third-party certificates of analysis (COAs).

ROWAN: Indie pet retailers can do two things to maintain their place as a trusted supplier of knowledge and products to shoppers. They can invest in employee education and invest in food brands, like Rawbble, that have not jumped channels. This will keep shoppers dedicated to indie pet. With online, big box and grocery all taking share from the independents, brands like Rawbble that protect the independent and provide class-leading quality should be embraced.

PPN: What does "transparency" mean to your company, and how has consumers' desire for transparency shaped your business?

HILL: Transparency is absolutely critical to us—we have focused on high integrity and transparency from day one. Knowing the source and extraction method, and providing batch-testing



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Industry Roundtable

results of our ingredients are basic essentials that we believe all retailers should know about the products they carry.

QUINN: QR codes on products direct our customers and wholesale buyers to our third-party COAs that evaluate what

should be and what shouldn't be in hemp CBD pet supplements. We not only test for the concentration of CBD, other phyto-cannabinoids, and terpenes, but we also test to ensure the absence of mold, bacteria, chemicals, fertilizers, and other potentially harmful substances like lead and

arsenic. I originally created these products for my best friend Dante the Service Pit with help from our board of clinical veterinary advisors to make sure I didn't hurt my best friend. Phyto has continued this pledge of safety and quality throughout all our products. •

Health on the Shelf

How three pet specialty retailers curate the nutrition products featured in their stores, plus the trends that resonate with their customers the most.



Participants:

LORIN GROW, owner of Furry Face in Redlands, Calif.

SAMANTHA HENSON, clinical pet nutritionist at Premier Pet Supply, which has six stores in Michigan

CYNDI WELLS, owner of Pet Pangaea in Los Alamos, N.M.

PET PRODUCT NEWS: What nutrition trends are your customers currently responding to?

LORIN GROW: We're primarily a raw nutrition store, but, lately, people are looking for something in between highly processed and raw. This means the lightly cooked category is hot. There aren't a ton of options in this category like the others, but what is available has been increasingly in demand.

SAMANTHA HENSON: Trends we are seeing lately have a lot to do with heart health. This has been the first time in my decade-long career in pet nutrition that multiple pet owners a day are coming in asking for heart supplements. Of course, it's all due to the recent FDA study [linking grain-free foods to a type of canine heart disease known as dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM)] and mass emails from local veterinarians. Making sure they are not flocking to foods loaded with corn and rice, we are showing customers different options, decent grains like barley, oats, brown rice, etc. We're also ramping up our education about raw diets for our customers.

CYNDI WELLS: Although research into di-

lated cardiomyopathy in dogs and its potential correlation with certain diets has been an area of research for a while, our clients' concerns grew with the more recent media headlines. Because we had been watching the developments carefully, we were able to address their questions. This interest in the role of nutrition in their pets' health has really been a great opportunity to educate on how to critically read ingredient lists and the guaranteed analysis on pet food labels. As a result of these concerns, people also seem more open to discuss their options in pet food. Our clients are also far more receptive to trying pet foods that aren't the kibble-type that they might have always fed in the past. We have seen a definite sales boost in our air-dried, dehydrated and freeze-dried foods as well as our frozen-raw lines.

People are also more likely to try supplements that we suggest for their pet. We have seen bone broths gain in popularity, too. Client interest in cannabidiol (CBD) pet products has also steadily grown.

PPN: How do you evaluate the foods, treats, supplements and other nutrition products that you put on your shelves?

GROW: Wow, that's a complex answer in my case! Who the company is matters as does their philosophy, integrity, veracity, attention to detail, etc. Having direct contact with someone in upper management beyond the field rep is critical. I need to know how long the company has been in existence, if they focus on one category or dabble in several, ingredients, sourcing, grade of meat, quality, where it's made, co-packer info, how it's made, temperatures and length of time anything is heated/cooked/baked/roasted/dehydrated/air dried/freeze dried/high pressure processed (HPP), any third-party certificates of analysis (COAs) or testing analysis, any manufacturing processes, past/current issues, recalls, etc. I have and am willing to sign any non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) to obtain information. Once a brand is brought in, this information continues to be monitored and reviewed with time, as changes are not uncommon.

HENSON: We evaluate ingredient panels scrupulously. We are extremely

picky, and we don't have extra space for adding new things all the time. For foods, we look for new, fresh-faced, great-quality foods from small companies. Humanely raised meat, human-grade ingredients and simple formulas. Nothing loaded with grains, peas or potatoes. We also don't bring in any treats with sweeteners, i.e., sugar, molasses, corn syrup, etc. For supplements, if we have a need and they are obviously good quality and we know we have a customer base for it, then we will usually try it. Also, with all of these, if enough customers are requesting them, we will always do our best to bring it in.

WELLS: We always ensure that any products we stock are those that we would be happy to give to our own pets. Quality and safety will always be key. We pay careful attention to all ingredients and their sourcing. We also look for transparency from the manufacturer. Their willingness to answer our questions plays a role in our evaluation. And, we look for third-party testing. What data is available to us? How frequently do they test? If the product meets our criteria for quality and fills a niche in our product mix, we will often, before stocking a product on a regular basis, give some to a few of our clients and ask for feedback. Many clients really enjoy the opportunity to try new products, and we get excellent feedback for a small investment.

PPN: What do you offer your employees in terms of pet nutrition training and education?

GROW: All training is ongoing and specific in my store. Staff needs to understand all differences in brands, ingredients, how to ask the right questions, how to listen, be able to guide clients appropriately based upon the animal's needs and the client's wishes, which might include self-imposed limitations and financial abilities. Staff needs to be able to think beyond the client's spoken limitations. Most things are not all or nothing, so being able to offer options and alternatives is extremely helpful for clients and reduces stress and guilt. Staff attends webinars, online and in-store manufacturer training and tiered

training programs put together by me for each category of items carried in the store to include videos, manuals, books, etc.

HENSON: We're at a slight advantage because we have an on-staff clinical pet nutritionist (CPN), and I get to train everyone personally, but I would encourage owners to do mandatory trainings available through all of the manufacturers. Many have wonderful and informative online training programs with incentives like merchandise for completing them. They are easy to do and really help employees with their confidence.

WELLS: Employee education is also critical to staying competitive. From client feedback, we know that our clients greatly appreciate that we can help them wade through the marketing and provide information that allows them to make the best decisions for their pets. Employees undergo a rigorous three-month training period before they begin working on the store floor, using many different sources. We have materials developed at Pet Pangaea from my research, including our own videos on pet nutrition as well as worksheets. All employees also complete [the Pet Industry Distributors Association's] Pet Store Pro nutrition module and take the test. We have books on pet nutrition and some papers on specific topics, like chronic renal failure, in our educational program. Online manufacturer educational resources and tests are also helpful.

But, the training doesn't end after their initial training. Our bi-weekly team meeting always includes an educational topic to help us keep on top of developments in pet nutrition and pet food. We also invite manufacturer representatives to present information on their products at these meetings. We joke that we are at the end of the Earth in our small mountain town and getting representatives here is challenging. However, we have made this work by doing this type of training via videoconferencing. This live interaction is really helpful as it gives employees an opportunity to ask questions. Our employees also take horse nutrition and other courses through resources outside of what one might consider as the traditional pet in-

dustry, like Coursera.

However, if employees cannot deliver all that nutritional knowledge in an effective manner to our clients, that knowledge would be useless in achieving our mission of improving the well-being of pets, so we also have focused training on client service. My favorite training program for client service and sales is the Retail Sales Academy. All of our employees complete the initial program, and then continue with the program's ongoing professional development.

Employees are also encouraged to take advantage of educational opportunities at trade shows.

PPN: How do you see the category evolving in the next five years?

GROW: Hopefully, people will be drawn more to preventive overall wellness than managing illness after the fact. Better and real food options, herbs and supplements, critical reviews of products and services, etc., are key to raising a long-lived and healthier animal.

HENSON: I think once the DCM and grain-free issue is figured out, we will know a lot more about commercial dog food. We already know that commercial pet food is not perfect, and I'm curious to see what changes will have to be made in the upcoming years to protect our pets. I assume quality control will have to increase. I'm hoping we could get standards similar to European Union's standards.

WELLS: I believe we will continue to see great interest from clients in high-quality nutrition for their pets and that the pet food industry will respond with more options outside of the basic dry food format. Baked foods and raw-coated dry food and dry foods with freeze-dried inclusions that are available now have opened the door for more people to see the benefits of foods in formats outside their former comfort zone. More people also seem to be willing to spend a little more time on food preparation for their pets; perhaps this change will result in more products with options for more tailored nutrition. I think this evolution would be a positive development for pet health. •

QC

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CBD

Know *your* CBDs

The hemp and cannabidiol (CBD) category has been a runaway success, but retailers need to do their homework to understand the ever-expanding options.

BY LINDSEY GETZ

THIS ARTICLE IS BROUGHT
TO YOU IN PART BY
PET RELIEF

Cannabidiol (CBD) products are gaining a lot of attention from consumers, both from those looking to address problems such as joint pain or anxiety and those seeking to maintain their pets' general health and well-being.

"As customers and retailers become more educated on CBD and how it supports their pets' overall health, we're seeing an increase in customers purchasing our products as a preventative for their generally healthy dogs and cats," said Chelsea Gennings, vice president of sales for Pet Relief in Littleton, Colo. "So much of pet care has traditionally been reactive, but pet parents are increasingly looking for products that help their healthy pets remain healthy for as long as possible."

Angela Ardolino, founder of CBD Dog Health in Lutz, Fla., said that when owners do seek out alternative treatments for pets that are experiencing health conditions, it is often because traditional treatments have failed them—or, in many cases, because the pet is suffering.

"Once pet parents begin to learn about all of the natural, holistic remedies that have been proven effective time and time again, they don't want to go back to costly prescription drugs, which can create more problems," she added.

People are looking for natural products to improve their own health and that of their pets, said John R. Taylor, natu-

TRADE TALK

Chelsea Gennings, vice president and co-founder of Pet Relief in Littleton, Colo.

How can retailers help educate consumers who are new to cannabidiol (CBD) understand the benefits and possible uses for these products?

In order for a retailer to properly educate first-time customers on CBD products or CBD in general, they must be highly educated themselves. With a product so unique and different than anything else they currently purchase for their pet, having someone sell it to them with confidence is key. All Pet Relief retailers have access to our retailer dashboard, an online platform created to educate our partners in the most convenient/easy-to-use way possible. It contains educational videos, quizzes, blog posts and a host of other resources so they can feel extremely supported from both an educational standpoint and a sales standpoint.

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CBD

ropathic doctor and founder and CEO of NWC Naturals Pet Products in Laguna Hills, Calif.

"As CBD continues to get a lot of press, it's no wonder that more people want to know what it is and how it might be able to help them and their pets," he said.

OFFER GUIDANCE

Considering that CBD products for dogs and cats are still relatively new, many customers might not even be familiar with them, or they could have misconceptions about them. Therefore, education is paramount.

"If retailers want to promote the category, their efforts need to focus on education," said Steve Saxton, founder and CEO of Green Gorilla, which has U.S. headquarters in Los Angeles. "There is a wealth of information about how to use CBD and its effectiveness when used as a remedy for certain conditions. Retailers need to cut through all the hype and clutter and provide customers with the facts. Providing a fact sheet at the point of sale, for example, would be hugely beneficial."

Growing CBD product sales requires engagement between customers and employees, said Heidi Hill, founder of Holistic Hound, a manufacturer of CBD-based pet products that also operates a pet supply store in Berkeley, Calif.

"Education is essential, as there is a great deal of misinformation and misunderstanding regarding the use of CBD products for animals," Hill said. "At the same time, there is a glut of options on the market, and customers often need help differentiating between these selections and learning how to choose a product that is safe and suits the particular needs of their pet."

As more and more retailers add these products to their stores' shelves—and more customers begin to show interest—the need for education becomes an ongoing endeavor. Dan Owens, co-owner of Four Dogs Pet Supplies in Charlotte, N.C., has made a concerted effort to stay abreast of the latest information about CBD and to really listen to feedback from customers. He said their input is providing him with anecdotal information to

share with other clients whose biggest question tends to be "Does it really work?"

"It's still pretty new to us," Owens said. "We're using it on our own elderly dogs so that we can offer our personal experience, but we're also asking our customers to share their feedback about how it's working for them. We're looking at it from an ongoing education standpoint and continuing to try to learn more about it."

As interest in CBD grows, retailers should expect that customer questions will be aplenty, which could also present the opportunity for future educational occasions such as workshops or other events, Gennings said.

"To take customer education to the next level, offering CBD-specific demonstrations or in-store events is a great way for retailers to dedicate time to educate their customers in a high-impact and long-lasting way about CBD," she said.

WHAT'S NEW

From oils to treats, manufacturers are offering a variety of new CBD products.

Pet Releaf recently released Liposomes Hemp Oils, its first line of products under its new division, Pet Releaf Professional. According to the company, the brand-new oil technology gives pet owners the convenience of administering the CBD oil directly on their pet's food without losing any efficacy. The products are available in two potencies: Liposomes Hemp Oil 330, which contains 100 milligrams of active CBD for small dogs and cats, and Liposomes Hemp Oil 1000, which contains 300 milligrams of active CBD for medium- to large-breed dogs.

Ardolino said that CBD Dog Health recently released some products specifically formulated for cats.

"Our cat products [are] the companions to CBD Dog's Calm, Ease and Heal, and include all-natural essential oils to alleviate anxiety, stress, pain and serious illness," she said.

Last year, Green Gorilla introduced CBD Lamb Recipe dog treats. Green Gorilla Hemp & Olive Freeze-Dried Dog Treats come in a 2.1-ounce bag and are

100 percent natural, with no fillers or additives.

Holistic Hound is adding three new products to its line of full-spectrum hemp supplements this year.

Full Spectrum Hemp & Mushroom Soft Chews contain full-spectrum hemp oil with 6 milligrams of water-soluble CBD, utilizing nano-emulsion technology for increased absorption and effectiveness, as well as ashwagandha, an herb that is used to promote calmness,



PET RELEAF

Top: Pet Releaf recently released Liposomes Hemp Oils, its first line of products under its new division, Pet Releaf Professional.

Bottom: Holistic Hound's new Full Spectrum Hemp & Mushroom Soft Chews contain full-spectrum hemp oil with 6 milligrams of water-soluble CBD as well as the herb ashwagandha.



HOLISTIC HOUND



SHUTTERSTOCK

hormone balance, immunity, joint health and more, Hill said.

Full Spectrum Hemp Healing Balm for dogs blends organic, full-spectrum hemp oil with 150 milligrams of CBD with essential oils, butters and other natural healing ingredients to treat a variety of conditions, Hill said, noting that it can be applied topically as needed to help with pain, wound care, hot spots, itching, dryness, yeast and more.

The company's Full Spectrum Hemp Oil with 1,000 milligrams of CBD offers a stronger and more concentrated option for maximum health benefits, according

to Hill. The 1,000-milligram tincture utilizes water-soluble nano-emulsion technology for increased absorption and bio-availability.

SALES STRATEGIES

With so many options on the market, Gennings said that one of the best ways to improve sales in the CBD category is to really get to know the products, which might mean slimming down a store's product selection so that retailers can promote items they are truly familiar with and understand.

"The biggest correlation we see across our top retailers is that they carry a very limited number of CBD brands," Gennings said. "Although CBD products are becoming increasingly popular in the pet industry, most pet parents' general knowledge of CBD is very minimal. Carrying one to two brands that a retailer has complete confidence in and

that they've taken the time to truly educate themselves on makes the selling process much easier. In order to properly promote CBD products in-store, a retailer has to thoroughly understand the benefits and brand differences, which can be hard to achieve when carrying a large variety of options."

Sometimes, it might take a sample to help win over those hard-to-convince customers.

"My biggest recommendation is for retailers to let customers try it themselves," Ardolino said.

CBD-based treats can also serve as a segue into ultimately selling the oils, said Jessica Swartout, store manager at Urban Tails Pet Supply in Minneapolis.

"Oils are our best-seller, but some of our more skeptical customers might buy the treats because they're unsure about trying the oil first," Swartout said. "Treats are a great introductory product that we've found often leads to CBD oil purchases down the road." •



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Treats & Chews

super snacks

Pet owners look for wholesome, tasty tidbits that will please their pups.

BY SANDY CHEBAT

THIS ARTICLE IS BROUGHT
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**EMERALD
PET PRODUCTS**

SHUTTERSTOCK

Transparency in the manufacturing process is crucial when it comes to dog treats and chews, according to industry insiders.

“A smarter, more informed consumer demands that they know what they—or their pet—are consuming, where it comes from and how it is made,” said Joe McIver, brand manager for Whitebridge Pet Brands in St. Louis.

Art Nakagawa, president of Artvark Pet Products in Van Nuys, Calif., agreed, noting that ethically sourced and sustainable ingredients are paramount for consumers.

In addition to the rising popularity of made in the USA products, pet specialty retailers reported increased sales of local offerings that are made in their own backyards.

“Made in USA products have been sought after by customers for years, and dog treats are no exception,” said Jeff Reibert, buyer for CountryMax Stores, which has multiple locations in New York state. “The trend for local products—in our case, made in N.Y.—has increased as well.”

Keefer Dickerson, marketing and outreach man-

TRADE TALK

Glenn A. Novotny, president and CEO of Emerald Pet Products in Walnut Creek, Calif.

How have pet owners' preferences for treats and chews changed in the past few years? What are they most focused on when it comes to purchasing these products?

Pet owners are seeking out ingredients with additional health benefits through unique ingredients that provide holistic approaches to resolve common health concerns that come directly from the human side. Treats were originally thought about as a “cookie” type of product that owners knew were not really healthful, but it made them feel good to reward their pets. That has changed in the industry from a “cookie” to a truly healthful supplemental reward, giving the consumer the opportunity to treat their pet while at the same time giving them ingredients to aid in digestion, omega support, anti-inflammatory and other health benefits. Pet parents now have the option to pick treats and chews that are 100 percent digestible, healthy and made in the USA.



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ager for Nashville Pet Products, which has stores in Tennessee, said, “Customers are very interested in unique proteins, sustainability and where ingredients are sourced.”

Retailers also reported that consumers favor treats containing wholesome ingredients, great flavor and appropriate sizes.

“The age and size of their pets are important factors in determining the products they purchase,” Reibert said. “The flavors and textures are more subjective to the pet’s preferences.”

In addition, the sales of cannabidiol (CBD)-infused treats are up, according to retailers.

In the pet chew category, retailers noted that customers are most interested in rawhide alternatives, size and durability.

“Alternatives to rawhide and body-part chews has been a hot trend that continues to expand,” said Glenn A. Novotny, president and CEO of Emerald Pet Products in Walnut Creek, Calif. “The strong demand is coming from the soft treat category, which can be attributed to the popularity of smaller dogs as well as the ability for older dogs to easily chew.”

That said, longer-lasting chews are still in demand, according to Sue Hepner, co-owner of Cool Dog Gear, which has stores in Pennsylvania.

“They want more than chomp, chomp, swallow,” she said.

TWO TRENDS PULL AHEAD IN INGREDIENTS

Manufacturers are paying attention to what’s already popular on the human side as they develop new treats and chews, according to insiders.

“The same ingredients we see trending in the human side is trickling over to the pet category,” Novotny said. “Ingredients like chia seeds, quinoa and pumpkin continue to gain popularity. As pet owners experience benefits from specialty ingredients, they want their pets to be able to share the same experience.”

Peter Toolan, founder of Benebone in New York, agreed.

“There has been a growing trend for people-friendly flavors—blueberry, pumpkin, banana, sweet potato—because we’re making this connection between human and dog,” he said. “It seems that natural flavors are ... appealing for dogs as well as humans.”

Ingredient combinations that resemble human dinner favorites are also catching on, McIver said.

“Combining quality proteins, [such as] beef with bacon, or proteins and vegetables and fruit, [such as] turkey and cranberry, seems to be resonating with pet parents, and brands are catching on,” he said. “I see more innovation in treat flavors emulating popular human food meals, possibly with international twists or USA-focused flavors.”

The second major trend in treat and chew ingredients is CBD or hemp products. Nakagawa said he doesn’t see the trend slowing any time soon.

Reibert said he sees this segment of the category growing steadily as clients become increasingly knowledgeable about these ingredients.

“CBD and hemp-infused products are hitting the market hard as pet owners become more aware of the benefits and effectiveness of these treats,” he said. “These products are designed to aid conditions such as arthritis, anxiety, joint pain, seizures and a variety of other ailments that occur in our four-legged friends, especially as they age.”

The treats and chews category is

4 Ways to Promote Dog Treats and Chews

Industry insiders recommend that pet specialty retailers use a combination of techniques to market dog treats and chews. Here are four strategies that retailers can employ:

1. Digital Marketing

“YouTube videos and social media are the two things we do to support retailers from an information standpoint,” said Art Nakagawa, president of Artvark Pet Products in Van Nuys, Calif.

Many companies spread the word through digital channels, such as e-newsletters, website banner ads, videos and social media.

“We send emails to our subscribers the day our new sales circular starts, and it links to our current ad on our website, where customers can view the complete ad,” said Jeff Reibert, buyer for CountryMax Stores, which has mul-

iple locations in New York state. “We’ve improved efforts to reach our customers through social media.

“In particular, we’ve increased the number of posts and added a mix of fun, lighthearted posts with new product announcements and product knowledge posts,” he said. “Recently, we added sales videos highlighting several products in our current circular, and we’ve seen an increase in our reach and interactions.”

Connecting with consumers on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook is also effective, insiders said.

“Bundling products—buy food, get X percent off treats—with a special code you promote on your social channels is a great way to entice pet parents to make a visit, and drive them to actively interact with your social channels,” said Joe McIver, brand manager for Whitebridge Pet Brands in St. Louis.

2. Signage/Displays

Because treats are an impulse buy for many

shoppers, McIver said, “eye-catching, in-store signage highlighting the benefits of treats can help persuade a customer to make the purchase.”

The primary way staff members at CountryMax Stores inform customers is through colorful sales circulars and corresponding in-store signage.

“We select several treats and chews to focus on each sale, and we include eye-catching images and descriptions to educate and encourage customers to purchase products,” Reibert said. “We highlight new products and offer introductory savings to encourage customers to try.”

Placing treats near the registers or in secondary displays also effectively boosts sales, McIver added.

3. Special Promotions and Events

Nashville Pet Products, which has stores in Tennessee, has found success with Treat of the Month promotions.

“We always encourage our customers to

seeing new products hit the market, as well as updates to old favorites.

Last summer, Whitebridge Pet Brands relaunched its Dogswell treat brand with a meaty treat portfolio in new packaging. Three functional formulas, including Hip & Joint, Immunity & Defense and Skin & Coat, are available in a variety of forms, including jerky, mini jerky, grillers, soft strips and tenders. The USA-made products contain real meat as the first ingredient, said company officials.

In response to consumer requests for larger pack sizes, Emerald Pet Products debuted its Twizzies dog chews multipacks in size 6 and size 9 in September. Twizzies are available in four flavors: Chicky, Piggy, Turducky and Peanutty.

For cats, the company launched Wholly Fish! treats, chicken-free and poultry-free crunchy treats made using salmon and tuna. The treats are available in limited-ingredient formulas in Salmon and Tuna flavors, and available with ginger root plus turmeric in Digestive Health formulas.

Both Twizzies and Wholly Fish! treats are made in the USA. •

bring their pup in for a treat, and the Treat of the Month is what we offer them,” said Keefer Dickerson, marketing and outreach manager. “This gives us a chance to talk about the same product over and over for 30 days to about half of our daily customers.”

Peter Toolan, founder of Benebone in New York, recommended adoption and holiday weekend sale events, which he said helps independents compete in a crowded market with big chains and e-commerce.

4. Connections

Making connections with the local rescue or shelter is another way to get the word out while also benefiting animals, Toolan said.

“It’s good to do, and it’s good for business,” he said. “[Rescues and shelters] always need things to keep dogs occupied while waiting for their new homes. You also can find the most committed and passionate pet parents at these places, and they look for quality and care for their animals.”

“Alternatives to rawhide and body-part chews has been a hot trend that continues to expand.”

—Glenn A. Novotny of Emerald
Pet Products



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Wellness

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Whether pet owners are looking to get Fido and Fluffy on the mend or seeking everyday health solutions, pet supply retailers can help by curating a comprehensive selection of first aid and wellness products.

BY SANDY CHEBAT

THIS ARTICLE IS BROUGHT TO YOU IN PART BY

TOMLYN
VETERINARY SCIENCE

SHUTTERSTOCK

More dog and cat owners want treatments and preventives they can use at home, from e-collars, bandages and wound-care items to ear-cleaning products, hot spot treatments and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.

"We're seeing an increased awareness of the pet first aid and wellness product category in general, and it is driving growth in the category," said Tom Wien, director of marketing at Cardinal Pet Care in Azusa, Calif. "People are becoming more knowledgeable about over-the-counter remedies and first aid products and how they can be used to treat their pets' minor injuries and health conditions. They're also seeing how preventive care for pets can help reduce injuries, sickness and vet visits."

An example of this, Wien

TRADE TALK

Brittany Green, product manager for Tomlyn Veterinary Science in Fort Worth, Texas

The average pet owner seems to be getting more proactive about taking care of the health and wellness needs of their companion animals. What's driving this trend, and how is it impacting the development and sales of products in this category?

The pet industry is one of the few industries that continues to grow despite other economic trends. This is due largely in part to the shift in thinking toward animals, as they are no longer viewed as a pet but a vital member of the family. Consumers now care for their furry friend as another child and will provide the necessary health care and enrichment to extend their lives. Many pet parents will thoroughly research products and often turn to social media and influencers for information that can be extremely impactful, both positively and negatively.

At Tomlyn Veterinary Science, we strive to educate all levels of the industry including distributors, retailers, consumers and influencers on all our products, as well as the health and wellness of animals as a whole, to offer a valuable resource for knowledge, not just selling products. Our staff of veterinarians plays a vital role in this initiative by providing us relevant content to share that is informative, topical and easy to understand so consumers can make informed decisions. [When we] properly educate the consumer, the pet parent can make well-informed decisions to positively impact the health and wellness of their pet for years to come.

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said, is e-collars or “cones.” Instead of only purchasing them post-surgery, pet owners now realize these items can help promote “the healing of routine cuts, skin infections and insect bites by preventing the dog or cat from licking them and creating a hot spot.”

This understanding pairs with pet owners’ increasing focus on solving problems rather than simply masking symptoms, according to industry insiders.

“We are seeing an obvious trend toward treating the root cause of a problem instead of the symptoms,” said Sarah Hudson-Sims, buyer for Pets on Broadway in Portland, Ore. “It’s really an across-the-board change in attitude by both our customers and our staff toward treating pet wellness issues.”

Retailers and manufacturers said that among consumers seeking these products, there has been a rise in demand for natural and even organic products that are made in the USA.

“We’re seeing an increase in customers seeking out natural alternatives as opposed to using medicine or the veterinary route to fix common health ailments,” said Toni Shelaske, owner of Healthy Pet Products, which has stores in Pennsylvania. “Even with hot spots and skin issues, they’re working at home instead of going to the vet.”

Hudson-Sims agreed and cited increased sales in herbal and homeopathic remedies at Pets on Broadway.

In particular, dog and cat owners want preventive aids that contain no chemicals, dyes or preservatives, said Beth Sommers, president and chief merchandising officer of Pura Naturals Pet in Ardsley, N.Y. She added that USA-made products are a major focus as well.

“This trend has been influenced by a variety of things, [such as] our constantly changing government tariffs, and the widely recognized safe manufacturing and labor practices that are a focus of USA-made products,” she said.

CURATE AND OPTIMIZE YOUR ASSORTMENT

For pet retailers, choosing an appropriate assortment of first aid and wellness products is crucial for sales success,

according to industry participants. Because so many products fit into this category, most sources recommended a broad assortment and price point.

For example, Hudson-Sims said Pets on Broadway stocks a mix of natural and synthetic products in several price ranges.

“You won’t have everything that a customer could possibly ask for, but it’s good to have something in the general range of what a friend/vet/online forum may have recommended to your customer,” she said.

Geoff Hamby, marketing director at Vetericyn Animal Wellness in Rialto, Calif., said preventive products are necessary, and he encouraged retailers to include ear-cleaning systems formulated for dogs and cats in their inventory.

“We suggest keeping a selection of products on hand for the more common eye, ear and skin ailments,” Hamby said. “Skin-related problems are usually small cuts and scrapes, or topical skin issues like hot spots, torn pads and sores. Other common issues are irritations in the eyes and ears as a result of allergies, dust, water, etc.”

Customer education and awareness are also key components to increasing sales in the category, according to industry insiders. Couple these with effective displays and cross-merchandising, and stores are finding a winning combination.

“Education is huge in this category because many pet owners are uncomfortable caring for wounds or doing routine eye and ear cleaning,” Hamby said.

He recommended using online as well as in-store strategies to educate and boost sales.

“Blogging, social media and in-store classes are all great ways to educate your customer on the products and their impact on pet health,” he said. “There are also more traditional marketing tactics like couponing, bundling or cross-merchandising.”

Wien agreed that cross-merchandising first aid and wellness products in other store sections creates opportunities for add-on sales.

“For example, retailers could include an antiseptic spray and liquid bandage

in their outdoor product assortment,” he said. “Styptic powder can be located next to the grooming and nail clippers aisle, and calming products could be featured near crates and other travel products.”

At Animal Connection in Charlottesville, Va., owner Pattie Boden groups products by categories such as skin and coat, allergies, digestive, hip/joint and more.

“We also provide in that display some information about the most popular conditions people are asking us to resolve,” she said.

Creating a high-visibility first aid and wellness station that is stocked with a wide variety of products draws attention to the category, Wien said, and several retailers said this format works well in their stores.

The health and wellness section at Pets on Broadway is located “an easy distance from our front counter,” Hudson-Sims said. “We encourage staff to approach anyone in that aisle more than anywhere else in the store. The array of products can be confusing, and help is almost always appreciated.”

The section is organized by health issue—such as tear stains, digestive aids and hot spots—and features 2-inch-by-4-inch product recommendation tags that say “Staff Favorite” with the associate’s name and why he or she likes that particular product.

In the center of Healthy Pet Products stores, Shelaske has a department called the Medicine Cabinet where wellness and supplement products are stocked and divided into cat and dog sections.

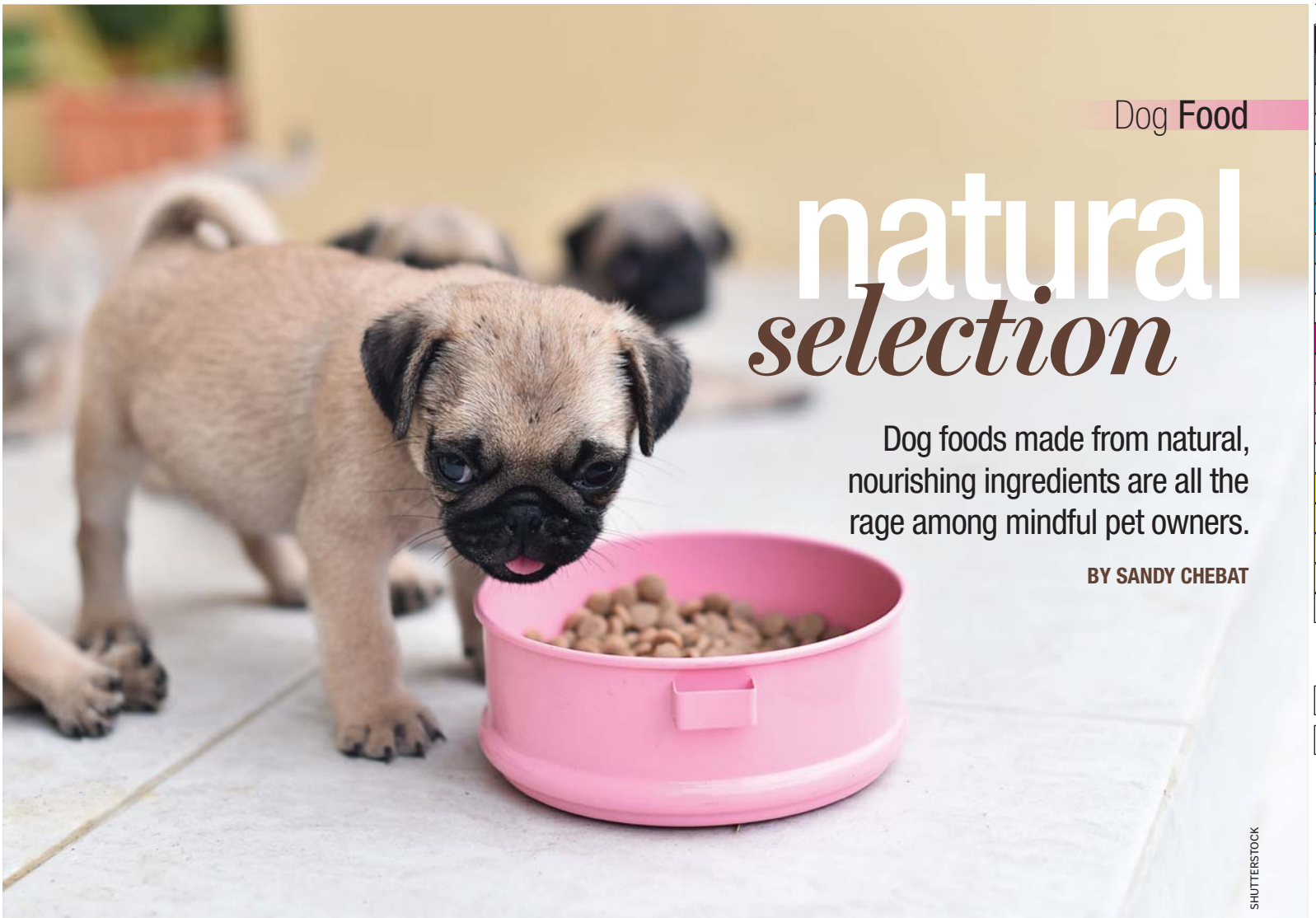
“We have tried them categorized by ailment and categorized by brand, and either works fine,” she said. “But if a store’s staffing is on the lighter side and has less payroll hours for customer education, I recommend going with ‘ailment’ so customers can figure it out on their own.”

The shelving behind the wellness endcap contains first aid products, such as slings, cones and vet wrap, because the categories tie in together, she said, adding that these items are not divided into cat and dog categories. •

natural selection

Dog foods made from natural, nourishing ingredients are all the rage among mindful pet owners.

BY SANDY CHEBAT



SHUTTERSTOCK

Sales of pet food remain a constant driver of growth for the industry overall, and natural dog foods continue to gain a larger share of the market, according to industry insiders. An influx of natural dog foods has hit the scene in recent years, making the category more competitive for manufacturers.

Ann Hudson, vice president of marketing for Tiki Pets, a brand of St. Louis-based Whitebridge Pet Brands, said pet food companies must work harder to differentiate themselves and their products.

"The natural category is oversaturated, and you really have to work hard to stand out from the crowd," she said.

Human trends continue to significantly influence natural dog foods, according to industry insiders.

"The single most important influence on the natural diet category continues to be the human food market," Hudson said. "'Natural' means good, and 'good' means eating whole ingredients, fruits,

vegetables, lean meats, etc. And many of the things we feel good about eating will eventually end up in our pet's food."

Better-educated consumers and their desire to give their pets the very best are also influencing manufacturers to search for more innovative ingredients.

"Innovative concepts include ingredient sourcing—like [from] New Zealand and Thailand—limited or fewer ingredients in a diet, and formats like whole foods," Hudson said.

One example of this use of nontraditional ingredients can be found in Fromm Family Pet Food's formulas that include rabbit and unique protein blends such as beef, pork, trout and lamb.

Other notable proteins on the market today include catfish, goat and kangaroo, according to Barb Emmett, president and owner of Godfrey's—Welcome to Dogdom in Mohnton, Pa.

She also reported seeing companies using montmorillonite dry clay for trace minerals instead of synthetics, goat's

milk and kefir.

"Anything fermented in products is going to be hotter," she said. "Mussels and sardines are going to come up [as well]; it's a hot topic right now and a big deal for dogs making their own taurine or not."

Ancestral feeding is another rising consumer trend, reported Julie Washington, chief marketing officer for Champion Petfoods in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

"They seek foods pets once sought in nature, so a greater presence of fresh and raw meat ingredients," Washington said. "They're [also] looking at micronutrients in diets, and choice rotation is a topic coming up more than before. Limited ingredient has continued to grow because of dogs with sensitivities, allergies or preferences."

Tracy Alford, owner of Animal Nutrition & Grooming Center in Roseville, Calif., said she's seeing more customers move away from kibble to feeding canned, raw, dehydrated or freeze-

Dog Food

dried diets.

Emmett reported similar trends in her store.

“Our growth is in raw,” she said.

Many of these consumer trends are being largely influenced by the internet and social media, according to insiders.

“These trends are coming from the internet blogs, Instagram and Facebook posts, and warnings from the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration],” Alford said.

Bryan Nieman, brand director at Fromm Family Pet Food in Mequon, Wis., agreed.

“The ease in which pet parents can access information through digital outlets and social media continues to drive awareness and prompt demand,” he said.

Retailers and manufacturers concurred that dog owners increasingly want quality, nutritional diets for their dogs and do not hesitate to educate themselves to make sure they are providing the very best.

“We have new customers every day who want to switch to something healthier,” said Michelle McConnell, co-owner of A Natural Pet Pantry in Osprey, Fla. “People are educating themselves and not necessarily taking their veterinarian’s recommendations without doing some research on their own.”

“The single most important influence on the natural diet category continues to be the human food market.”

*—Ann Hudson of
Whitebridge Pet Foods*

DIETS MEET SPECIFIC NEEDS

Recently introduced natural dog diets are focusing on limited ingredients and specific pet sizes. Still, grain-free and novel protein varieties remain on trend, according to manufacturers.

Last year, Fromm Family Pet Food added a recipe to its Four-Star Nutritionals line: Rancherosa. The canine kibble

features a blend of beef, lamb, pork and trout paired with pinto beans, peas and chickpeas to offer consumers a grain-free entrée, said company officials.

The food is formulated to meet the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) dog food nutrient profiles for all life stages, including growth of large-sized breeds that weigh 70 pounds or more as an adult, officials added.

The company also launched its Four-Star Nutritionals Shredded Turkey in Gravy Entrée last year. Formulated as a nutritionally complete wet diet for all life stages and lifestyles, the food contains shredded turkey simmered in broth with vegetables, including potatoes, carrots, green beans, peas, and pinto, kidney and white beans.

Last year, Champion Petfoods introduced two SKUs for its Acana Singles dry food line: Turkey & Greens and Beef & Pumpkin. The company also enhanced its other Acana Singles recipes—Duck & Pear, Pork & Squash and Lamb & Apple—by increasing the real meat ratio from 50 to 60 percent, reducing the carbohydrates to 25 percent and shortening the ingredient panel, according to the company.

Tiki Pets, a brand of Whitebridge Pet Brands, recently added three products to its Tiki Dog Aloha Petites line, which is formulated to meet the nutritional needs of small dog breeds. Aloha Petites for Puppies is a grain-free formula that comes in Chicken, Peas and Lentils Luau flavor in a 3.5-pound bag.

Aloha Petites Mousse for Puppies is a chicken-flavored wet food that contains chicken liver, pumpkin, salmon oil and probiotics for increased digestibility, said company officials. Aloha Petites Mousse for Seniors comes in a chicken and beef flavor and includes salmon oil, turmeric and pumpkin.

Tiki Pets also introduced Tiki Dog Meaty cups in five all-meat, limited-in-



SHUTTERSTOCK

redient formulas, which include: Chicken, Chicken & Egg, Chicken & Beef, Chicken & Salmon and Chicken & Duck. The 3-ounce cups are protein packed and completely grain and carbohydrate free, officials said.

PRICING TRENDS

Pet specialty retailers and manufacturers report that while there are more natural food options for pet owners to choose from, these foods are frequently more expensive than other commercial diets. However, despite rising natural dog food prices, sales have continued on an upward trajectory because customers understand the value these diets offer their pets.

Price is not the sole driver for pet owners, according to Nieman.

“Today’s pet parents are in search of high-quality products from reputable manufacturers,” he said. “Price itself is not the only motivator, especially when it comes to the safety and quality of the food they feed their pets.”

Hudson agreed.

“Consumer dollars are being stretched across a number of categories, and pet owners are looking for affordable solutions,” she said. “But they will pay a premium if they genuinely believe the quality and functional benefits will be truly worthwhile for their pet.”

Retailers across the nation reported similar findings.

“Over the years, I have been amazed at what most people will pay for their pets’ health; I thought I was the only one,” McConnell said. “People will pay for quality, and they realize that good food is not inexpensive.”

Emmett agreed.

“For the most part, in the pet food industry, the higher the price, the better the food will be,” she said. •

kibble *is* king

Dry foods still reign as the preferred feeding method for most cat owners, and foods with quality ingredients that mirror cats' ancestral diets are in demand.

BY LINDSEY GETZ



SHUTTERSTOCK

A majority of cat owners are gravitating toward feeding their pets dry food on a regular basis. In fact, in 2016, 74 percent of cat owners reported feeding dry foods to their cats most often, according to the American Pet Products Association's 2017-2018 *National Pet Owners Survey*.

The convenience of kibble is very appealing to cat owners; however, more than ever before, they are becoming more discriminating about the food they scoop into their pets' bowls.

"Consumers want to feed high-quality ingredients that will help their cats live longer, healthier lives," said Gina Zaro, marketing director for Dr. Elsey's Cat Products in Englewood, Colo. "There is an overall focus on simplification and getting back to the ancestral diet of a cat."

The need to feed cats a more healthful diet that they will actually eat is an ongoing battle for cat owners and the retailers that serve them.

"Cat parents want the best for their

cats but know that they can be finicky about their food's texture and flavor," said Chanda Leary-Coutu, director of consumer experience for WellPet in Tewksbury, Mass. "As a result, passing the 'taste test' is usually the first requirement for dry food."

A high-quality dry food that does not sacrifice taste or nutrition should keep cats satisfied. But Matt O'Leary, manager of Felix & Oscar in Springfield, Va., said that cat owners are still wary of taking any chances, which is why offering a guarantee on all brands sold in the store helps ease owners into trying something new.

"They know that if their cat absolutely won't eat it, they can bring it back for a full refund," O'Leary said.

Kelley Parsons, manager of Denny's Pet World in Kirkland, Wash., said that her store has the same policy.

"Cats are finicky," she said. "That's why we stress that cat parents can return a bag of food for a full refund if their cat won't eat it. Without that promise, I think

they'd be more reluctant to try something new."

CONVERT THEM WITH CONVERSATION

While convincing cat owners to upgrade to a higher-quality food can be difficult, successful retailers said that education makes all the difference.

"It's an uphill battle for sure," O'Leary said. "Once a cat gets hooked on a particular food—even if it's a lower-quality brand—it's hard to encourage a switch. But it's not impossible. It's largely a conversation-driven effort, as we explain the benefits. Switching from a low-quality food to a high-quality one also makes such a tremendous difference in the cat's health that once they do it, there's no going back."

Marni Lewis, owner of The Green K9 in Mount Dora, Fla., agreed. She also called the effort to get cat owners to switch a "battle," but said that it is worth the work.

"Cat parents don't always know that their pets need more protein and fewer

carbs,” Lewis said. “That’s where education really counts. While our optimum choice would be a raw diet, a premium dry food diet is still much better than the brand they were likely getting at the grocery store. Once they start seeing healthy changes in their cat, they’re a customer for good. They trust you, and they’ll come to you for advice going forward.”

Lewis said that one way the staff at The Green K9 educates customers is to ask cat owners to actually bring in a bag of food they are currently feeding their cat so that they can compare bags.

“We will compare the nutrition so that they can see with their own eyes what the difference is,” she said. “People are often very visual, and they need that side-by-side comparison to truly understand the difference.”

Jennifer LaPointe, brand manager for Solid Gold Pet in Chesterfield, Mo., said cat owners often welcome guidance as they shop. Education can give them

itself or supplied by a third party to verify the accuracy of the statements being made?”

VARIETY IS KEY

Having an optimal product assortment is incredibly important for the kibble category, Leary-Coutu said. Because cats are unique when it comes to their nutritional needs and individual taste preferences—even more so than dogs—having a wide range of dry food to choose from is crucial, she added.

“Retailers should look to stock recipes with a variety of ingredients that cater to cats’ differing palates and sensitivities including grain- and poultry-free recipes and meals with unique protein sources that go beyond the usual chicken and salmon offerings,” Leary-Coutu said. “Retailers also need to consider solution-based formulas and indoor recipes that suit cats’ sedentary lifestyles. All of these considerations



“There is an overall focus on simplification and getting back to the ancestral diet of a cat.”

—Gina Zaro of Dr. Elsey’s Cat Products

confidence about their choices.

“Shopping dry cat food can be overwhelming with what seems like endless options,” she said. “Helping consumers understand why they would choose a specific food makes the product selection less overwhelming. With educational materials in-store and at-shelf product navigation, cat parents will have the help they need in picking the right food for their cat.”

Of course, it is important that retailers know their stuff. Patrick Mendicki, vice president of sales and business development for Pureluxe Pet Food in Atlanta, said retailers should investigate the claims being made by manufacturers.

He suggested retailers keep key questions in mind—for example, “Does the manufacturer have the back-up data to show their transparency, and is the back-up data being provided by the company

need to come into play when figuring out the right product assortment.” Stocking a robust selection means retailers will be more likely to have the exact recipe cat owners are seeking, she added.

Parsons said that solution-based formulas are particularly important to her shoppers, and she makes sure they are well represented in her product assortment.

“The majority of cat parents that come in looking to switch their cat’s dry food do so because they have a problem,” she said. “Whether it’s allergies, itchy skin, hairballs or something else, they’re looking for a solution that works.”

When putting together the perfect product assortment, retailers should keep shoppers’ wants and needs firmly in mind, Zaro said.

“Retailers should be looking for foods that are based on the true needs of a cat while also delivering transparency at the shelf,” she said. “They need

to understand what their customers are looking for in cat food. Then they need to consider the trends in the market and be able to deliver those to the customers.”

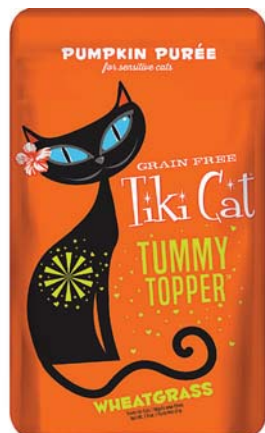
NEW PRODUCTS

Meanwhile, manufacturers in the category are consistently introducing new formulas to meet evolving consumer demands and trends.

Solid Gold Pet has introduced Indigo Moon with Alaskan Pollock & Eggs. The dry recipe is a grain- and gluten-free, high-protein, low-carbohydrate food made with fresh-caught, omega-rich Alaskan pollock and nutrient-dense whole egg, said company officials.

WellPet has expanded its line of balanced dry recipes for cats with a recipe for indoor cats called Wellness Complete Health Grain-Free Indoor Healthy Weight. The Chicken & Turkey Meal Recipe contains fiber and L-carnitine to assist in weight control, while glucosamine and chondroitin help maintain healthy hips and joints in cats that might be carrying extra weight, according to the company. WellPet has also added Wellness Core Indoor Salmon & Herring Meal Recipe. It supports lean muscle mass with a protein-rich and poultry-free dry food, company officials added.

Last year, St. Louis-based Whitebridge Pet Brands launched Tiki Cat Born Carnivore for Kittens. The high-protein kibble contains real chicken combined with highly digestible egg and nutrient-packed chicken liver for superior palatability, said company officials. The grain-free Chicken & Egg Luau Recipe includes omega-6 and omega-3 essential fatty acids from salmon oil and flaxseed, as well as pumpkin to help support healthy digestion. •



WHITEBRIDGE PET BRANDS' Tiki Cat Tummy Topper is a meal enhancer that provides functional benefits with a great taste, the company states. The Pumpkin-Wheatgrass formula is pureed, with no added sugars or fillers. Pumpkin and wheatgrass provide a great source for vitamins and minerals as well as fiber for digestive health. The product comes in a 1.5-oz. pouch. tikipets.com



THE HONEST KITCHEN'S Pour Overs are pourable stews that are slow-cooked and add a nutritional boost to whatever is in a dog's bowl. The 100 percent human-grade, wet toppers are available in Bone Broth Stew, Pumpkin Stew and Superfood Stew. Each variety comes in three flavors and boasts a range of nutritional benefits, including supporting healthy digestion, packing an antioxidant punch and adding a boost of protein. They are optimally sized for a daily topper and serve as a healthful grab-and-go alternative for those who feed canned food in conjunction with kibble. They are made with limited ingredients and contain no gums, BPA or extra synthetic vitamins. thehonestkitchen.com



Lucy Pet Hip to Be Square dog treats from **LUCY PET PRODUCTS** are meaty, chewy, semimoist natural treats that are made in the USA. Premium meat is the first ingredient, and the grain-free treats are

available in three formulas: Chicken, Duck and Salmon, with pumpkin added for a delicious taste, the company states. The treats use high-quality ingredients that are responsibly sourced from trusted suppliers. The limited-ingredient treats are excellent for pets that have sensitivities to grain, and they are perfect for training or as an everyday reward. The treats contain no corn, wheat or soy. Proceeds help animals through the Lucy Pet Foundation. lucypetproducts.com

PURA NATURALS PET offers its **Organic Healing Kit**.

It comes with Organic Moisturizing Nose Rescue, Certified Organic Paw Rescue and Organic Healing Aid. The products rub in easily and have organic healing properties. Their food-grade ingredients are safe if licked, the company states. The products are certified USDA organic and are made with organic oils. They are free from chemicals, parabens and fragrances. The made in the USA products contain no synthetic dyes or perfumes and no preservatives or additives. puranaturalspet.com



HIGGINS PREMIUM PET FOODS offers inTune Complete & Balanced Diet for Birds. The food does not contain artificial preserva-

tives or flavors. The diet uses colors sourced from seeds, spices and vegetables for natural, subtle colors. The tropical aroma is derived from real banana, pineapple and citrus. Balancing these natural aspects, inTune has added vitamins, minerals and amino acids. The antioxidant formula contains balanced DHA omega-3 and -6 fatty acids along with stabilized vitamin C and vitamin E to support the immune system. Fruits, vegetables and highly cooked grains are added to support the digestion of carbohydrates. Protected probiotics are added to promote the delivery of active, beneficial bacteria to the intestinal tract in order to support digestive health. It is available for macaws, parrots, conures, cockatiels and parakeets. higginspremium.com

GRIZZLY PET PRODUCTS' Grizzly Hemp-Enhanced Hip and Joint Aid contains the same five active joint support ingredients as the company's original Joint Aid product, enhanced with organic phytocannabinoid-rich (PCR) hemp to help address discomfort. It is available for dogs and cats in a liquid or mini-pellet formula. The product helps relieve occasional joint stiffness and discomfort, and it aids in the natural maintenance of joints, the company reports. grizzlypetproducts.com



Products



CLEAR CONSCIENCE PET presents the **SuperGravy Supersized 120-serving pouch**. The larger size of SuperGravy is ideal for multidog households, pet resorts, veterinary clinics, shelters and rescues. The package offers 120 servings at the cost of 90. The pet food topper instantly transforms dry kibble into highly palatable and more easily digestible hydrated moist meals, the company states. The non-GMO formulas are free from grains and gluten and are made with a short list of whole superfoods. They are supplemented with active probiotics and digestive enzymes for better daily digestion and gut health. clearconsciencepet.com



FROMM FAMILY FOODS presents **Fromm Crunchy O's**. Each recipe features a blend of premium ingredients including meats or cheese, fruits and vegetables with an airy texture that delivers a truly unique and audible crunch. The company uses a manufacturing process designed to "puff up" treats to create a loud crunch when they are eaten. Special care and handling goes into the time-intensive process to create consistent taste and crunch every time. Flavors include Blueberry Blasts, Smokin' Cheese Plosions and Pumpkin Kran Pow. frommfamily.com



VET + INSTINCT offers its **Coat Care Coconut + Dandelion Root holistic superfood**. Made from 100 percent real ingredients, the formula naturally nourishes the canine skin and coat. The product softens and hydrates the coat with organic coconut milk combined with dandelion root extract to support a normal inflammatory response of the skin. Because skin and coat concerns come from a wide range of causes, this superfood supplement cares for the whole of the animal with spirulina algae to aid cognitive function, brewer's yeast for allergy and immunity support, and reishi mushroom to help relieve stress from the external environment, the company states. vetinstinct.com



PETNET'S SmartFeeder is a Wi-Fi connected automatic cat and dog feeder. Using the Petnet App, owners can personalize their pet's daily meal times and portions, order pet food for delivery and even feed their pet from their phone. It comes with a one-year limited warranty and customer service for the life of the product. The feeder is compatible with Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant and Nest Cam. petnet.io

VITAKRAFT SUN SEED presents **Sunseed Vita Balance**, a complete nutrition pellet diet specially designed to promote dental health in rabbits and guinea pigs. The larger size and innovative grooved shape of each pellet encourages more intensive chewing to help keep teeth trim and healthy. It is made with veterinarian-recommended timothy hay, with specialty ingredients like yucca to help reduce pet odors, and without any artificial colors, flavors or preservatives. sunseed.com



SURE PETCARE offers **Animo**, a lifelong activity and behavior monitor that learns and accurately interprets the unique behavior and activity patterns of a dog. It delivers insights into a dog's activity and sleep as well as problem behaviors such as shaking, scratching and barking. These insights help owners to understand the changing needs of their pet over its lifetime, enabling them to provide proactive and personalized pet care. Animo connects to the Sure Petcare Animo app via Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE), where owners can set and monitor daily activity goals for their pet as well as view their pet's activity and behavior reports by day, week, month or year. surepetcare.com



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