

# **The Truth About Pet Diets & the Use of Grain**

**Pet owners spend more than \$8 billion a year on pet food in the United States. There are numerous companies vying for those dollars, and some will push the boundaries with misleading and outright false advertising. The Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) is an association of local, state and federal agencies charged by law to safeguard the health of animals and humans, ensure consumer protection and regulate the sale and distribution of animal feeds.**

## **Deceptive Terminology & Trends**

**You should know that terms such as "holistic" and "human grade" are not defined by the AAFCO and, therefore, are not truly accurate when used to describe a pet food. Simply confusing is use of the word "organic," which does not refer to the quality of the ingredients in a pet food, but rather the process by which the plants and animal meat used in the pet food are grown or raised.**

**Finally, it is important to know that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) states that raw meat diets for animals are "not consistent with the goal of protecting the public from significant health risks particularly when such products are brought into the home and/or used to feed domestic pets." To put that into perspective regarding raw meat diets, there is a reason that the lifespan of dogs in ancient times was less than two years, and their raw meat diet was a major factor.**

**Perhaps the most over-hyped and misleading trend in**

**pet food sales is the advertisements that tout grain-free diets as being best for your pets, as if grain is a bad thing. Nothing could be further from the truth. Corn is often vilified as causing food allergies when, in reality, the incidence rate of adverse reactions to corn in food is 1.5 percent, which is the same as rice. Another common refrain is that corn is not digestible. The truth is that very few animals digest whole corn well, but pet food manufacturers process the corn by grinding it to release the fat, starch and protein within, making it more than 91 percent digestible. Some will call corn a cheap filler, but corn actually has superior nutritional value. There are plenty of lower-quality pet food manufacturers that do use fillers, but fillers do not have nutritional value, and corn is not a filler.**

**Finally, you may hear it said that carnivores like dogs and cats do not do well on a diet high in grains. That is based on a misunderstanding of the word "carnivore," which simply means that to get all of the essential nutrients needed in their diet in the wild, some animal protein would have to be included in the diet. It does not mean that pets need to subsist solely on meat. Imagine if you tried to live on a diet based exclusively on meat! Your health would suffer greatly without the nutrients you would be lacking if you consumed a meat-only diet.**

**Whole wheat also is processed much like whole corn. This healthy ingredient provides us with wheat gluten, which is 99 percent digestible and contains more than 80 percent protein, as well as vital amino acids, including 40 percent glutamine. The amino acid glutamine is essential for maintaining gastrointestinal health, preserving muscle mass and synthesizing nucleic acids and other proteins. Wheat is not highly allergenic, but there is a very small**

**percentage of the population that is gluten intolerant. Think of all the people you know, and now consider how many are gluten intolerant. It's a very small percentage, isn't it? Grain-free and gluten-free diets have been formulated for these people and pets.**

**All of the other pets in the world do well on a diet with multiple protein sources, including meats, such as chicken, as well as wheat gluten and corn gluten meal, to meet all of their amino acid needs and to provide a high plane of nutrition that will actually prevent disease. In addition, the addition of wheat gluten in pet foods reduces flatulence and odor, as well as improving stool quality, which is very important to the family member who has to pick up after his or her pet!**

## **Seek Professional Advice**

**In closing, I urge pet owners not to believe every advertisement they read or every rumor they hear about pet diets. Talk with your veterinarian, who will take into consideration your pet's breed, age, overall health and lifestyle. He or she can give you several recommendations for a high-quality, nutrient rich diet that not only will enhance the quality of life for your pets, but also contribute to a long, healthy life.**