

Trends & Products Natural

In the Raw

Raw food options expand to match consumer demand.

BY STACY MANTLE

Pet owners are spending more time dishing out grain-free, organic and all-natural foods to their pets. According to GfK, from 2014-2015 retail sales of raw freeze-dried dog food jumped nearly 64 percent, while raw frozen pet food increased from \$52 million to \$69 million. A study by Research and Markets stated that the total North American pet nutraceuticals market was valued at over \$1528.4 million in 2015 and is projected to continue to grow significantly between the years 2015 and 2020.

While raw diets are rapidly increasing in popularity, there is still confusion about what raw means and how best to define the term. Lacking an official definition by the FDA, retailers will need to become more educated than ever on pet nutrition and diets if they want to succeed in this category. A change in terminology may help, as consumers tend to be more inclined to understand “species-appropriate” or “ancestral” diets.

Convenient and Healthy

Most agree that there are many benefits of a raw diet, including healthier skin and coat, stronger teeth and bones, and an overall improvement in health. But raw diets have traditionally been difficult to feed, and lacking in guidelines and nutritional analysis. These days, prepared foods in the dehydrated or frozen category are sweeping the industry for their ease of use and nutritional benefits. It's important to let consumers know that raw is more accessible and easier to feed than ever.

Bravo's Canine Cafe Grain & Gluten Free Dinners are raw meals that come in three different protein options. They are packaged in cans for easy feeding. Complete and balanced nutrition for dogs of all ages and breeds, Canine Cafe meals

feature prime cuts of meat as 95 percent of the ingredients. There are no artificial preservatives, flavors, colors or grains of any kind in their foods.

Primal Pet Foods also has a long history in this category. According to the company's website, all Primal Formulas contain fresh ground bone for calcium supplementation. This combination of ingredients offers optimum levels of the amino acids (protein), essential fatty acids, naturally-occurring enzymes, and vitamins and minerals that are necessary building blocks for your pet's healthy biological functions. They also offer a full line of raw meaty bones for dogs and cats

to have as part of their daily feeding or as a treat to enhance their tooth, gum and jaw health.

For those seeking alternative proteins, Sojos recently introduced their line of shelf-stable raw dog food called Sojos Wild. This high-protein, ultra-premium diet is made with freeze-dried, exotic meat or fish as the number one ingredient. Sojos Wild is available in free-range venison, wild boar or wild-caught Alaskan salmon varieties.

“2016 is an exciting year for us,” said Chanda Leary-Coutu, senior marketing communications manager at [WellPer](#). “We started the year off by welcoming

PET AGE

Minneapolis-based raw pet food company, Sojos, to the WellPet family to expand the breadth of WellPet's offerings, as well as to reach pet parents interested in the benefits of raw nutrition. Combining more than 100 years of pet nutrition experience, this acquisition brings a commitment of excellence to Sojos and WellPet's consumers, both through our distribution facilities and quality of our products."

Expect to see a variety of unique protein combinations throughout the industry in 2016.

"Our Totally Different! Duck, Mango, and Wild ocean-caught tuna fish are hand packed and consist of a hand-selected blend of unique proteins and superfoods to serve your cat the most healthy and palatable complete and balanced dinner," said Chelsea Sher, co-founder of Against the Grain. "Mangoes are 'The King of Fruits' and are loaded with vitamins C and A and carotenoids, which help support a healthy immune system, kidney health and bladder health."

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Top it Off

Not every consumer will be ready to convert to fully raw diets. That's where the new toppers trend comes in.

"Our brand new Proper Toppers product addresses the customization/mix-in trend," said Lucy Postins, founder of The Honest Kitchen. "Proper Toppers are a dehydrated, crispy whole food solution that can be sprinkled or crumbled onto meals for added variety as well as to boost nutrition and palatability. They're 90 percent meat plus dehydrated whole superfoods, vitamins and minerals. Proper Toppers are also nutritionally balanced and complete, so they can also

be fed as the sole diet if desired (for example, for smaller breeds or when traveling). We're launching two flavors to begin with (chicken and turkey) and plan to add some new recipes as well as a feline version, in the future."

The Honest Kitchen also offers a line of epicurean pet food and new minimalist lines, as well as a variety of premium treats and supplements, including ProBloom, a dehydrated raw goat milk that contains probiotics and digestive enzymes that help settle sensitive stomachs.

Other notable raw supplements on the market include Ewegurt, a relatively new addition to the market that uses sheep's milk to provide a nutrient rich powerhouse of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and polyphenols. Owners sprinkle it on a pet's food to reap the benefits of this superfood and calming agent.

"I created this product out of a need to help my golden who suffers from anxiety that caused him to have seizures because his cortisol levels spike during stressful situations," said Jennifer Erdman, founder and managing partner of Ewegurt, LLC. "Ewegurt has helped him be almost seizure free!"

Selling raw foods and treats successfully depends on educating the customer.

"As natural pet foods become a staple in many pets' diets, it is important for retailers to know the benefits specialty lines can offer cats and dogs," Leary-Coutu said. "Pet parents interested in making the switch to feeding their cats natural treats have high standards when it comes to ingredient quality and sourcing. It is important to provide consumers with clear and accurate information regarding their pet's food so they are able to make a well-informed decision on what food or treats would work best for their pets."

Stacy Mantle is an award-winning writer and multi-species pet lifestyle expert, author, and spokesperson. She is the founder of PetsWeekly.com and a regular contributor to national publications including Pet Age, Cat Fancy, and Animal Behavioral College.

