

Safer Foods, Healthier Pets

The pet food industry underwent some major changes in 2007. More than 5,000 products - about 60 million individual packages of food - at all price levels were recalled. The wheat gluten in the wet foods produced by major manufacturers contained dangerous chemicals like melamine. As consumers and pet lovers learned more about the lack of regulation in the pet food industry, they became outraged. Sales of pet food plummeted after the recall, because many pet owners felt safer feeding their pets with "people food" until they knew what alternatives were safe. This consumer response brought about changes in the industry. Major retailers increased their oversight processes, and many stopped buying tainted foods from China. Some manufacturers have even developed plans to build their own dedicated facilities. But lots of Americans aren't satisfied. Almost two-thirds of American households have at least one pet, and these households have often started switching to organic or natural pet foods. This may be partially due to "humanization," a term that refers to the process of thinking of your pet as a family member. Recent surveys have revealed that consumers want pet food that makes their pets seem, well, more human. The Pegetables Dog Chew Treats, made by Splintek, are an example of natural pet foods. They contain many vitamins and minerals, as well as a balance of essential fats and proteins. They also contain vegetables like carrots, corn, and celery, which maintain healthy body functions. Pet owners can even treat their friends to luxuries like Doggie Dance chicken tenders or biscotti that tastes like liver. The pet food industry is responding and using "natural" ingredients and preservatives, like vitamins, oils, and spices. These new practices are closely monitored: all products labeled "organic" must contain at least 95% of ingredients that meet the standards for organic foods for human use. Some manufacturers, like Newman's Own Organics in California, have certified their entire product line as organic. They use only American ingredients and avoid potential problems like wheat gluten. Instead, they use healthy ingredients like chicken fat and fish meal (sources of essential fatty acids), soy meal and flax seed meal for protein, brown rice, barley, and oats for energy, and an array of veggies to keep your pet healthy. The "humanization" trend has affected Purina, which launched a new product in its Beneful line. These ready-to-eat meals come prepackaged in sets of eight, just like microwaveable dinners for humans. You can choose from entrees like beef stew with vegetables and barley, chicken with rice and vegetables, beef and turkey medley, roasted chicken and vegetable pasta, rice and lamb stew... the possibilities are numerous! All of these new products are designed to maximize healthy lives for pets by containing the proper balance of nutrients and vitamins. As people live longer, they want their pets to be there with them, and the "humanizing" trend makes this desire even stronger. Specially-formulated pet foods can be purchased for every stage of a dog's life, and for every size and breed of dog. But healthiness is only part of the equation. Consumers are preoccupied with the idea of "fancy" or "upscale" foods, and they are starting to look for those same qualities in the foods they buy for their pets. Owning a pet is now also having a friend and a member of the family who deserves the quality you do, which might explain why consumers have doubled the amount of money they spend on pets in the last decade.

About the Author

Ian Spellfield, an occasionally frustrated pet owner, tests and reviews cat urine removal products at his blog [Urine Off Reviews](http://www.urineoffreviews.com). You can follow his reviews and occasional heartache at <http://www.urineoffreviews.com>

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