

# A more sustainable pet industry

With more focus on ethically sourced ingredients, biodegradable packaging and upcycled waste products, what can you do to help make your own business greener? We ask those who are already doing their bit **WORDS** EMILY FOWLER

There are so many factors that make sustainability an important part of modern businesses – from the needs of the individual consumer to wider global socio-political concerns. Looking at the environmental impact of all of our processes, and aiming for the most responsible use of the earth's resources possible is essential in any industry. In terms of the pet industry, whether it's provenance of pet food ingredients, packing materials, or the process of manufacturing goods, there's been a definite shift towards more sustainable practices.

## Using sustainable ingredients

A study on the environmental impact of food published by the journal *Science* in 2018 assessed the real impact on food items, using data from almost 40,000 farms across the world and assessing their impact on emissions into the environment, use and pollution of water, air pollution, and land use. It showed that meat and dairy use 83% of the world's farmland and

produce 60% of the greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture, and while the main focus was obviously on human food production, a portion of that meat goes to pet food production.

One option for producing pet foods with more sustainable ingredients is the use of unusual proteins, like insects. The use of insects as a protein source in pet food has actually been talked about for a while, but we're only just seeing insect-based foods coming onto the market. In January 2019 the first insect-based dog food went on sale from UK company Yora (more info: [www.yorapetfoods.com](http://www.yorapetfoods.com)). While some consumers may still be unsure about such an unusual protein source for their dogs, and think they'd prefer the more traditional flavours, the reduced environmental impact is

## "Beco Pet continues to innovate using compostable food bags where they can"

sure to appeal to a huge section of the market. Food provenance is something that's important to many people shopping for their family's food, and the same concerns natural follow on to their family pet's food as well. Any pet food manufacturers that look at reducing their carbon footprint by, for example, choosing locally sourced ingredients, are making great strides in terms of sustainability.

## Reduce, reuse, recycle?

Excess packaging is something that's been a growing concern for many years, but recent public awareness of the damage that plastic is doing to our oceans (thanks in part to the BBC's *Blue Planet II*) has made it even more of a hot topic. Last year Theresa May pledged to eradicate all avoidable

plastic waste from the UK by 2042, by making changes like changing the rules so all businesses having to charge customers for plastic bags (not just those with 250-plus employees). In the pet industry, as in many other industries, it can be extremely tempting to try to appeal to the consumer's wish for an 'easy life'. Let's look at pet food as an example – single-use pouches are usually made of mixed materials, meaning they're not widely recycled, but they're often seen as more convenient than recyclable cans, particularly for households with just one pet.

Manufacturers that look at recyclable and biodegradable materials, and strive to reduce excessive plastic and packaging, should be supported by retailers because of the reduced environmental impact they have, but also because they're bound to be popular with consumers. Look at recent press about supermarket customers demonstrating their dislike of excess packaging by encouraging others to unpack

goods and discard the unwanted packaging in-store – it really shows the strength of feeling people have.

## Businesses leading the way for a sustainable future

I recently spoke to George Bramble of Beco Pets, a business that has had sustainability at its core right from the very beginning, with all of their products designed with minimal environmental impact in mind. When they first started the company, George and co-founder Toby used discarded bamboo chopstick off-cuts from factory floors to make sustainable, biodegradable, and hard-wearing pet food bowls. The company continues to innovate in terms of sustainable materials, using compostable food bags where they can, and having recently released new character toys made from upcycled plastic bottles. To tie in with the current awareness of plastic pollution in our oceans, some new sea creature toys are going to be launched at PATS. It's not just materials that Beco

## Beco Pets – a perfect example of sustainable business practices

- The fish in Beco food is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) so customers can buy products with confidence.
- Wild boar is used in Beco food, which has a much lower carbon footprint than farmed animals such as cows and sheep.
- All their ingredients are as locally sourced as possible
- (either in the UK or North West Europe), and fully traceable.
- They recycle bamboo and plastic to make Beco toys and accessories.
- The 2kg bags of food are 100% compostable and biodegradable.
- They're a member of the Pet Sustainability Coalition (more info: [www.petsustainability.org](http://www.petsustainability.org))

## Tips for running a more sustainable business

- Give customers the choice to have a printed receipt, instead of automatically printing them off.
- Replace your appliances with energy-saving ones (this one has the added benefit of saving you money!).
- Recycle as much as you can in terms of packaging and business supplies.
- Try to encourage your customers to bring their own bags – perhaps you could sell bags for life, or offer an incentive for customers who bring their own.
- Make sure the cleaning products used in your business are eco-friendly brands.
- Turn off all lights and electrical equipment at the end of each working day.
- Encourage your employees to follow suit – if you can create a culture of sustainability, you'll find it becomes second nature to everyone.

The first insect-based dog food has gone on sale in the UK.

Reducing plastic pollution is something we should all be thinking about.



The pet industry has its part to play in environmental issues.

are concerned with, they take an ethical stance on ingredients too. Looking for ingredients that are UK based, sustainable and traceable is important too, and consumers agree, as George says.

"I'm happy with the fact that customers are caring about where ingredients come from. It's great that they've taken our message seriously and continue to do so." Beco dry dog food was launched in 2016 and is made up of MSC certified fish, free range chicken, and wild boar (an eco-friendly alternative to farmed beef and lamb). Wet dog food is on the way this year, and as this (along with treats) will be a complementary food, they're looking to focus more on plant-based ingredients – and even more sustainable option.

## The role of retailers in sustainability

It's important to promote sustainable pet products, as well as the suppliers that make them, and by doing so you'll find that your customers are willing to pay for

them. Doing as much as possible for the planet and its future has never been more important to so many people, and the global pet industry is definitely making great strides towards more sustainable processes. As retailers, you can support those manufacturers that care about sustainability, and encourage your customers to make smarter choices when they shop.

Not only that, but have you ever looked at your own business practices – how would you score on the sustainability chart? It's well worth developing your own strategy for sustainability, because it's true that even smaller changes can make a difference – from turning off back room lights when staff leave the room, to looking at changing your POS system to one that makes your daily business more eco-friendly. Making changes to how your business works is not only good for the environment, it helps you meet your customers' expectations in terms of supporting social and environmental issues. **✍**

Examine your business practices with sustainability in mind.

