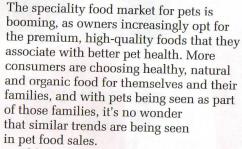
## Stock the latest in special diets



With more and more pet owners arming themselves with knowledge of the link between nutrition and pet health, here's a look at the current trends in the speciality pet food industry.

WORDS EMILY FOWLER, PETS JOURNALIST



Although 67.7% of consumers surveyed for the Conlumino Pet Care Sector Report



2015 cited price as an important factor in their choice of dog food, a whopping 91.6% stated that their dog's preference is also important. While retailers should always strive to offer good value for money, there's a difference between good value and 'cheap', and the majority of customers will realise that buying cheap can often be a false economy. Pet food that's bulked out with fillers and unnecessary additives probably won't be enough to fulfil pets' nutritional needs, so they're likely to need to eat more of the food just to try to make up for it.

With Conlumino's findings also suggesting that advanced nutrition is an important growth spot (with sales up over 15% on last year), it's even more important that retailers offer a wide choice of tailored

number of health benefits for both dogs and cats. Cats are obligate carnivores, which means they need meat to function properly, and regularly eating a food that's low in meat protein content is going to cause them problems.

Most dogs, especially growing puppies and dogs with active lifestyles, need plenty of protein to keep their joints and muscles in optimum condition, but there are certain health considerations (such as kidney problems) that might rule out high-protein diets. Your customers' vets are best placed to advise them.

## **Alternative protein sources**

The use of alternative protein sources in pet foods is not only helpful in alleviating some allergies in pets, but from a

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frozen chunks, they offer pet owners the raw pet food they want for their pets, in a medium that's completely nutritionally balanced, fuss-free and doesn't involve them having to deal with pieces of raw meat and innards themselves. For the retailer the question is – do you want to deliver these products to the customer's home, or are your premises situated where parking is easy and your customers are likely to be happy to load frozen food into their car? For many pet shops, the decision to start a delivery service is a natural step in order to compete with direct online sales. A decision on stocking raw is not to be taken lightly – since branded refrigeration equipment and a one-brand commitment may be involved.



interesting than the standard flavours pet owners are used to seeing. Exotic meats such as buffalo or kangaroo, for example, will catch your customers' attention and be seen as something slightly more special than the usual chicken or beef, and don't forget that different flavours can be good for tempting fussy eaters.

Despite the stereotypical cat that loves tuna, fish isn't something that cats would naturally eat in the wild. It is, however, a fantastic lean protein and it's currently also very popular in dog foods and treats.

In recent years, insect protein has been considered in pet nutrition studies as a sustainable and high-quality alternative protein source for cats and dogs although what consumers' initial reactions to 'grain-free grasshopper' or 'cricket crunchies' on your shelves would be is something to consider, despite the fact their pet probably already catches and eats the odd insect now and again.

## **Raw commercial diets**

Raw food diets have been lauded by many as the most natural way of feeding dogs and cats, and more owners are becoming interested in raw feeding their pets because of the possible health benefits, including better digestion and improved dental and oral health. While qualifications in canine or feline nutrition aren't necessarily required, providing completely homemade raw food diets that fulfil all a cat or dog's nutritional needs can be fairly complex, and many pet owners either don't have the time or aren't confident they'll get it right. There's also a squeamishness factor in handling and preparing raw meat and offal.

This is where commercially produced raw food diets such as those supplied by Nature's Menu, Nutriment and Natural Instinct come into play. Sold in handy Limited ingredients

Just as consumers want to know what's in the food they're eating, pet owners want to be able to understand what they're putting into their cat's or dog's bowl. They want what's best for their beloved animals, and knowing that what they're giving them as food or a treat is just one ingredient, or contains limited ingredients, makes them feel much better than a list of unfamiliar letters and numbers on the back of the box.

Companies like Symply Pet Foods show a great awareness of this preference among consumers, producing hypoallergenic ranges that are free from artificial flavourings and colourings and are made up of limited ingredients.

While new premium, alternative health and specialist diets tend to begin in the dog food market, it's reasonable for retailers to expect cat food and small pet food to follow the same trends – just look at the history of grain-free. Nicole Paley, Communications Manager at the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, agrees, "The trends in the dog food market tend to follow in cats – such as an interest in grain free, tailored nutrition and products that have a focus on well-being. We now have life stage diets for some small animals too so the tailored nutrition approach is definitely following here."

## Common conditions improved by tailored nutrition

- Food allergies
- Age related ailments
- Kidney disease
- Skin complaints
- Poor digestion