

PFI Response to I Heart Dog's "Open Letter to Dog Food Companies"

8/2/15

Dear Kristina,

As the head of the Pet Food Institute (PFI), I took your letter to heart. Pet parents should not have to worry about what they are feeding their family members.

Members of the Pet Food Institute (PFI) are the people who make ninety-eight percent of the cat and dog food produced in the United States. They have invested heavily in producing safe, nutritious food for cats and dogs and conduct extensive testing of ingredients and of finished products. While no one wishes for a recall, just as with recalls of human food (which the last time I checked the FDA website outnumbered pet food recalls in 2015 by 20 to 1) most are preventative, not a result of illness. Safety is priority one for PFI members and their commitment is to constant improvement. In fact, PFI member companies come together regularly to discuss best practices in the area of safety in order to improve them.

Cat and dog food is regulated by both the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and by individual states. State regulators regularly review products sold at retail and conduct their own testing for nutrient content and safety. This is on top of the company testing.

Regulators also review products claims and ingredients listed on the label. All ingredients in cat and dog food must be acceptable to federal and state regulators before they can be used.

Currently, regulations require that vitamins and minerals in pet food products be listed in the ingredient panel using their chemical name. Most of the chemical sounding ingredients are sources of essential vitamins, minerals, fatty acids or amino acids, such as pyridoxine hydrochloride (Vitamin B6), sodium selenite (source of selenium) and arachidonic acid (source of Omega 6 fatty acids). These and similar ingredients present no concern for alarm. That said, PFI agrees there are opportunities to improve pet food labels so they are more meaningful and understandable to pet owners. Over the next year or so, FDA is expected to advance a federal standard for pet food labels. During this process, PFI will advocate for revisions to pet food labels to make them consumer friendly.

So why are all these micronutrients in there? Most pet food products are designed to provide complete and balanced nutrition. Cats and dogs require 42 to 48 essential nutrients. Ensuring pet food products contain all those nutrients often requires supplementation with vitamins, minerals, fatty acids or amino acids. Pet foods do not contain "fillers" that do not provide nutrition. Every ingredient in a pet food product serves a function whether it be to add nutrients, provide texture (which is very important for cats), cause the food to hold its shape, preserve freshness, or perform in another capacity. Many ingredients serve multiple functions. Feeding a pet food that does not provide complete and balanced nutrition can be harmful, unless a pet has a particular health condition that requires a restricted diet.

Regarding sources of ingredients, in the United States, pet food makers often use ingredients that people do not eat. These ingredients are sometimes referred to as by-products. For example, while few Americans eat kidneys, livers, sweetbreads, tripe, intestines or trotters/feet, these items are all delicacies in other countries (France, England, Scotland, Spain, Italy, etc.). Byproducts are sources of high quality protein, minerals and amino acids, and their use is environmentally responsible because they do not take away from the human food supply or go into our landfills.

Later this year, FDA will unveil new federal regulations for the safety of all food, both for people and for pets. Those regulations will ensure that foods and ingredients that are imported are as safe as those grown or raised in the United States. PFI member support these new food safety regulations and they remain committed to producing food products to help our companion animals live long, healthy lives.

Sincerely,

Cathy Enright
President and CEO
Pet Food Institute