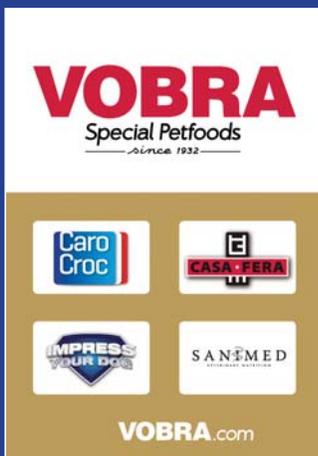




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Classifying Pet Foods

There is a wide variety of dog and cat foods in the market. Industrially prepared pet food comes in different brands and forms along with different prices and claims. How a product will be advertised and sold relates to the marketing concept. Contrasting, basic marketing concepts for pet food can be identified. Among these concepts, there can be modifications, combinations and crossovers.

Fully grown markets with a high percentage of pets consuming commercial foods have close to flat volume sales. In order to increase sales money value, pet food manufacturers launch more expensive products founded on new designs and nutrition trends. The selling points of products may concern price, exclusive ingredients, animal category, animal health or the owner's view of life.

The caregiver chooses a particular food and decides whether it works for his or her pet. Ideally, the owner's food preference corroborates a favourable reaction of the pet. Because the owners' notion generally is the starting point in selecting the right food, it may be reassuring, informative or stimulating to look at the pet food market categorised according to marketing concepts.

Product forms

Products with moisture content lower than 14 percent are commonly called dry foods. There are expanded (extruded) and pressed dry kibbles, dry dinners consisting of loose components, air-dried and freeze-dried products. The water content of frozen foods, autoclaved chubs and steamed products usually is about 65 percent. Sterilised foods in cans, pouches or trays may contain around 80 percent water.

Among dry and wet foods the ingredient composition can differ markedly. This may be reflected in the relative contributions of proteins, fats and carbohydrates to total food calories. For healthy dogs and cats, all types of well-formulated, complete and balanced dry and wet foods provide adequate nutrition. So far, there are no indications that energy composition or production process affects pet health.

Marketing concepts

Food price, expressed per unit of dietary energy, is mostly lower for carbohydrate-rich products than for those high in protein and low in carbohydrates. The non-defined terms economic, premium and super-premium represent price and quality levels. The differences may relate to inclusion percentages of starchy crops and/or animal ingredients with low or high ash content.

Gourmet foods provide anthropomorphic appeal to pet



Overview of pet food product groups in relation to various classification criteria

Moisture content of foods				
Dry foods			Wet foods	
Production method of dry foods				
Extruded foods	Pressed foods	Dinners	Freeze-dried foods	Air-dried foods
Production method of wet foods				
Sterilised foods	Autoclaved foods	Steamed foods	Frozen foods	
Price and quality of foods				
Economic foods	Premium foods		Super-premium foods	
Foods directed to animal categories				
All categories	Life stage	Life style	Breed specific	Functional
Humanised foods				
Functional foods	Philosophy-based foods		Gourmet foods	
Functional foods				
Foods with health claim(s)		Veterinary, therapeutic foods		
Philosophy-based foods				
Natural foods		Vegetarian foods		
Natural foods with distinctive ingredients				
Grain-containing foods	Grain-free foods	Meat-first foods	Raw foods	
Natural foods with distinctive philosophy				
Holistic foods	Organic foods		Ancestral foods	

owners. These foods are characterised by their taste allure and aesthetic attributes. The segment has an array of flavour offerings and textures. Names of human foods such as pâté, burgers, stews and pasta may be used.

A complete food must meet all energy and nutrient needs of the target animal. Complete dog or cat foods not referring to a distinct category are suitable for all animals. Most complete foods are directed to specific life stages for all breeds or less often for tagged breeds. Foods with claimed functionality also aim at animal categories.

Functional food is driven by humanisation of dogs and cats in the sense of caring for them with the same devotion and commitment as human family members. The same applies to pet food with philosophical basis such as natural, organic, holistic, ancestral and vegetarian. These foods are also purchased by trend followers.

Life Stage and Breeds

Puppies and kittens have higher nutrient requirements than their adult counterparts. This fact forms the foundation of life-stage food. In the light of indirect evidence, these foods might diminish ageing-related disease risks.

Breed-specific, life-stage foods pursue a marketing strategy that propagates tailor-made foods for individual breeds. There is very little information on breed-dependent requirements of nutrients. Future breed-specific foods might be formulated so as to control breed-dependent disorders.

Functional foods

Functional foods claim (health) benefits beyond basic nutrition. They have an adjusted ingredient and/or nutrient composition. Particular, functional ingredients may be used. The efficacy of



functional foods can only be evaluated by scrutinising the underlying research details and mode of application.

Functional foods other than veterinary, therapeutic diets purport to support or protect physiological conditions, but must not claim disease prevention, treatment or cure. Typical functional foods support skin and coat condition, weight control, performance, intestinal health and joint function. The market supply of hypoallergenic (sensitive) foods is overwhelming.

Natural foods

Mature pet food markets are dominated by natural foods and their grain-free subclass. Natural foods are not allowed to contain chemically synthesised substances, except for vitamins and minerals. Grains are pushed into unnatural, unhealthy and unsuitable, but the arguments are false. At the same time, well-formulated grain-free foods are nutritionally adequate.

Organic and holistic pet foods usually are grain-free or wheat- and corn-free. Organic plant and animal ingredients must meet defined criteria as to production and

processing. For commercial pet foods, the predicate holistic has no clear meaning.

Ancestral, evolutionary, instinctive or wild foods claim to simulate what dogs and cats would eat in nature. The extruded dry foods normally are grain-free and high in animal protein. Ancestral frozen and freeze-dried foods feature raw as additional claim.

Market overview

Pet food promotion items are convenience, production method, ingredient composition, animal category, health benefits, humanising of pets, or view of life of dog and cat owners.

The above shown tabular diagram classifies the different product groups. A product group in a certain line also has properties mentioned in the line(s) above. Due to overlapping of properties and adjustments, the market supply of pet foods is more complex than illustrated by the diagram.

Dr Anton C Beynen writes this exclusive column on dog and cat nutrition and nutrition related items every month.