

Canned pet food not the healthiest

THE pet food situation has concerned me for some years, my feelings brought to this by the current competitive marketing of various dental work stations for veterinary use.

The scene as I see it goes like this: "Here is the best food ever made for your dog Mrs Jones" handing her a can of commercial dog food or dry food, "but he may develop problems with his teeth, so here is a special toothbrush and paste for you to use to clean his teeth regularly, and then if that doesn't keep the periodontal disease at bay then we have the very latest in dental equipment just like your own dentist has, and we can give Fido that perfectly enamelled ivory grin" — that he would have had had you not fed him the commercial food in the first place.

Here we have the perfectly engineered commercial circle — a problem doesn't exist, so we create one, and then come up with all the remedial treatments.

Infiltration

The infiltration of the commercial pet foods into our lives is one of the great success stories of the business world. Gross sales figures for a single product type is probably only bettered by petroleum products worldwide.

We as a profession have been led by the nose by vested interests into a current situation where most younger vets actually recommend commercial pet foods as the best available way of feeding domestic pets — because they have never known of any other way. Before they had their first pet they were bombarded with constant mass media advertising instilling into them that various commercial foods are the only way to go, and when they graduated and went to postgraduate nutrition courses again they had this idea reinforced by visiting lecturers who actually mentioned brand names in their notes.

My experience with commercial canned and dry pet foods is that they:

- are a prime cause of periodontal disease in all breeds of dogs and cats
- are associated with an increased incidence of gastric dilation and/or torsion
- are a cause of diarrhoea in a substantial number of dogs
- cause intestinal "allergies" with associated dermal pruritis and behavioural changes in a significant number of cases
- are a prime cause of flatulence and offensive odour in dogs — some brands more than others.

We are objectively educated, of above average intelligence trained to observe and reason as undergraduates. We should develop the ability to assess products for what they are in spite of extremely effective advertising claiming otherwise. This is a mammoth and ongoing task for all of

us and certainly not just with pet foods.

In this case we should be giving clients advice to correct their pets diet towards a more natural one and not justify the financial outlay on the latest dental equipment available by advocating the wholesale feeding of commercial pet foods.

Breck Muir
Dickson, ACT

Far fetched claims

WE are surprised by the content of Dr Muir's letter (above), which is an attack on the integrity of the pet food manufacturers of this country.

The suggestion that the pet food industry has somehow engineered the problem of dental care so that someone else can develop a market for dental work stations is far fetched to say the least.

Our experience is that vets are not led by the nose, nor do they accept advertising claims at face value.

They often seek substantiation of the nutritional position of a product and reputable manufacturers are only too pleased to offer as much information and advice as they possibly can.

The positive and concentrated efforts made by reputable pet food manufacturers to deliver carefully formulated foods to satisfy the nutritional requirements of the particular animal and its stage of life appear to have been overlooked.

In undertaking such a task, much scientific research and protocol feeding is undertaken so the nutritional needs of pet animals are probably better understood than our own nutritional requirements.

The nutritional requirements of the domestic cat is only one of many excellent examples. We are still learning about the cat's nutritional peculiarities.

It is only recently, for example, that the cat's need for taurine has been recognised and that is not something the pet food industry dreamt up — it is scientific fact.

The best way to feed a pet animal is with reputable brands of pet food. In the main, these foods are nutritionally well defined.

The ingredients after all do come from by-products of human food supplies and the additives used are generally only those used in the production of food for human consumption.

Analytically speaking, the energy content, macro nutrient, vitamin, mineral, trace element and essential fatty acid contents of these products are known and designed to satisfy the requirements of the animal as defined by the National Research Council of the US Academy of Sciences, which is the accumulation of the most up-to-date world-wide knowledge on the subject.

Reputable pet food manufacturers also

have standards of the digestibility or biological value of the foods they manufacture.

Name a human food that is nutritionally so well designed. Would a return in the ad hoc feeding of raw offals, butcher scraps or table scraps — common some 25 years ago — be better for the animal?

We and most vets familiar with nutritional research agree that the feeding of miscellaneous scraps is not in the best nutritional interest of the pet.

Vets, being "objectively educated, of above average intelligence, trained to observe and reason as undergraduates" are not unlike many scientists employed in the pet food industry.

Casual observation or "experience" of commercial pet foods devoid of scientific evidence is not a sound basis for a professional critique. A literature search would have shown that the feeding of prepared pet foods is no more associated with gastric dilation/torsion than any other food.

Critical

It is the management of feeding of "at risk" pets that is critical, not what they eat. To deny that food allergies exist would be foolhardy but to suggest they result more often from commercially prepared pet foods than from "more natural" diets is pure speculation.

Large successful brands make significant investments in advertising. But brands do not survive on good advertising.

They must deliver what they promise and at least in the eyes of consumers it would appear the well known brands of pet food are doing just that.

With the economic strife Australia now faces, we would have thought it more appropriate to encourage ever increasing standards of excellence in a successful export industry such as the prepared pet food industry. Instead this letter attempts to cut the "tall poppy" down.

John Wingate
president

Pet Food Manufacturers
Association of Australia Inc

Drivers of livestock have new training

I was delighted to read the article by Judith Tonkin, AQIS senior veterinary officer on problems associated with transport of livestock (*AVA News* October).

The Victorian Department of Agriculture in conjunction with Livestock Transporters Association of Victoria and the Driver Centre of Australia has just completed its third livestock transport drivers training course in the last year.

Vets and livestock research officers have combined very successfully with the RSPCA and driver training specialists to present the two-day course.

The course takes 12 drivers through the intensive program. Topics covered