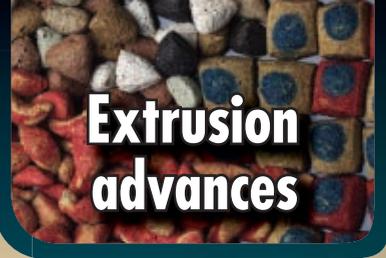


December 2008

# Petfood Industry

WATT

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**Extrusion  
advances**

## Rachael Ray innovates with Dad's

New brand from Dad's Pet Care, p. 16

**Private label bounces back**

**Consumers' online clout**





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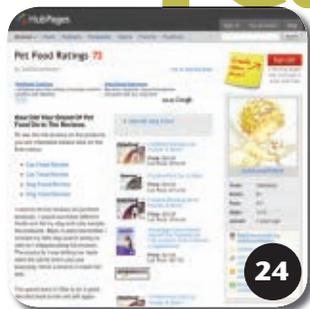


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**On the cover:** Rachel Ray and Isaboo with new Nutrish dog food. *Photo courtesy of Rachel Ray Nutrish/Dad's Pet Care.*

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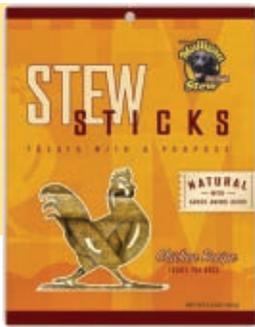
## Web departments

**1. New Products:** Search for consumer or manufacturing products in our database.

[www.petfoodindustry.com/ListConsumerProducts.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/ListConsumerProducts.aspx)  
or [www.petfoodindustry.com/ListManufacturerProducts.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/ListManufacturerProducts.aspx)

**2. Discussion Boards:** Read and post questions and responses to your colleagues in the industry. [www.petfoodindustry.com/Discussions.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/Discussions.aspx)

**3. Wenger Industry Poll:** Weigh in on the hot topics of the day and see if other industry professionals agree. [www.petfoodindustry.com](http://www.petfoodindustry.com)



## Exclusive Web content

### 1. Private label report

View Lee Linthicum's Petfood Forum 2008 presentation on Euromonitor's latest global report. [www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETprivate.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETprivate.aspx)



**2. Petfood Industry Radio: private label and retail markets** Listen to audio clips from Lee Linthicum's Petfood Forum 2008 presentations. [www.petfoodindustry.com/PlayRadio.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/PlayRadio.aspx).

**3. More on extrusion** Cletral Inc. offers new dryer technology, an important step in the petfood extrusion process. [www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETCletral.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETCletral.aspx).



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# Industry News

## Quick hits

- ▶ Super Dog Pet Food Co. appointed Robert Pickett Jr. as senior vice president for New England, USA.
- ▶ The USDA's Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration has verified the performance of Neogen's test for deoxynivalenol, which now can be used for official testing in the national grain inspection system.
- ▶ German pet store operator Fressnapf was named Pet Retailer of the Year by *PET in Europe*.
- ▶ K-Tron Process Group has a new eight-page brochure for the Premier Pneumatics line.
- ▶ Vitakraft has expanded into Portugal with its subsidiary Vitakraft Portugal Lda.
- ▶ Natraceutical Group and Bühler are combining their knowledge to offer the petfood market a coca-derivative exclusive ingredient.

## PetfoodForum 2009

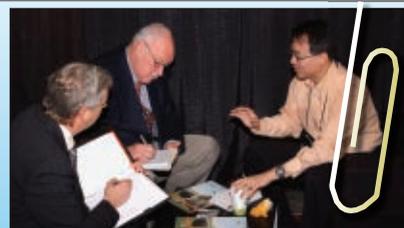
### Petco VP to speak at Petfood Forum

Petfood Forum 2009 will take place April 20-22, 2009 at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare Hotel near Chicago, Illinois, USA. Rick Rockhill, VP of dog food consumables for Petco, will talk about what pet retailers need and want from petfood manufacturers.

The keynote speaker will be Marty Becker, DVM, popular veterinary author and regular contributor to *Good Morning America*. His specialty is the power of the bond between pets and their people, and he applies the insights he's cultivated—from a career of writing on, speaking about and treating animals—to the unique opportunities facing our industry.

The premiere event for the petfood industry offers even more learning and networking opportunities than years prior. This year's line-up will also include:

- ▶ Informative sessions on market trends, functional ingredients, feeding trials and other key topics—presented by speakers specially selected through a rigorous call for papers program;
- ▶ Experts on provocative subjects like petfood politics, guerrilla marketing and more;
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- ▶ All-new networking event exclusive to Petfood Forum guests.



## PetfoodWorkshop 2009

ESSENTIAL TRAINING

Petfood Workshop: Essential Training will take place April 22-23, 2008. This seminar will provide a thorough overview of the petfood market, its structure and key players, plus the important growth driver of new products and how they impact the industry. Plus, can't miss break-out sessions delve into four fundamental areas of petfood:

- ▶ Nutrition and ingredients;
- ▶ Processing;
- ▶ Regulatory; and
- ▶ Packaging.

This essential workshop will also offer plenty of opportunities for you to network with other industry professionals, along with veterinarians and pet retailers who can benefit from learning all about the dynamic petfood industry.

Seating for this workshop is limited—sign up now! For more information or to register for Petfood Forum or the workshop, visit [www.petfoodindustry.com/petfoodforum.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/petfoodforum.aspx) or contact Jackie Thrash, Tel: +1.404.760.2823, Fax: +1.404.240.0998, [petfoodforum@meetingexpectations.com](mailto:petfoodforum@meetingexpectations.com) or contact Ginny Stadel at [gstadel@wattnet.net](mailto:gstadel@wattnet.net) or Tel: +1.815.966.5591. You can also write to: Petfood Forum/Workshop 2009 c/o Meeting Expectations, 3525 Piedmont Road NE, Building 5, Suite 300 Atlanta, Georgia 30305-1509 USA.

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## Can costs may eat into petfood margins, warns Menu



Makers of wet petfoods can expect a “major” increase in the price of cans in 2009, forcing them to either eat the cost or raise prices, Menu Foods warns in its latest quarterly report. The beleaguered Toronto, Canada-based petfood maker is in

what it calls a “rebuilding year,” following its involvement in the 2007 recalls. Looking ahead from the end of its third quarter, Menu said in a recent release that it has seen some raw material costs decline from recent highs.

“However, this has not been widespread and, in general, costs remain above the levels being experienced when the latest price increase was announced,” the company said. On top of that, the income trust said it’s been advised by its can supplier that it

should expect a “major increase” in the price of steel cans in 2009. “The fund believes that the other participants in the wet petfood industry, including the leading national brands, will experience these same cost challenges and that this will, at least, necessitate a price increase on petfood sold in steel cans,” Menu CEO Paul Henderson wrote in his message to unit holders.

On the upside, “recessionary times” usually mean a rise in demand for private label petfoods, as opposed to the major national brand names, the company said. Menu Foods’ main business is producing such private label brands for retailers.

The income fund posted a net loss of US\$2.05 million on US\$61.63 million in sales in its third quarter ending September 30, 2008, up from a net loss of US\$19.3 million on US\$78.1 million in sales in the same quarter the year earlier. Most of the costs of the 2007 recall had been expensed in the company’s first quarter 2007; Menu then saw the greatest impact from lost sales in that year’s second quarter. Its third quarter 2007, by comparison, saw buyers begin to refill their product pipelines after having been without product for several months.

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8 | Petfood Industry | December 2008

**Brits are still barking mad about their pampered pets.** While consumers in the United Kingdom have started to cut back on life's little luxuries, things are still looking remarkably good in the dog house, with the latest research from Mintel showing that the pet accessories and healthcare market is thriving. Indeed, this year British consumers will spend a massive £484 million (US\$728 million) on the family pet. Despite the economic downturn, this is a healthy 4% increase on last year's figures. Meanwhile, since 2003 sales have grown by a tail-wagging 19%.

While households continue to feel the squeeze, sales of pet accessories and healthcare are withstanding toughening economic conditions well, with a further 12% growth expected in the next five years. "The UK really is a nation of pet lovers and spending on our furry friends is one area we feel really reluctant to cut back on. Pet owners have a strong emotional tie to their pets and this has helped maintain strong sales," explained Harry Foster, senior market analyst at Mintel.

**New petfood report focuses on international market.** Reportlinker.com has announced a new market research report, *Focus on the World Pet Foods Market Brief*, is now available. The global outlook series on petfoods provides statistical anecdotes, market briefs and concise summaries of research findings, according to Reportlinker.com. The report also offers a bird's eye view of the structure and basics of the petfood industry from an international level, identifying major product market segments and trends within product categories. The report also features recent mergers, acquisitions and other strategic developments of significance.

The report includes a fact-finder directory of 193 companies worldwide. It is available at <http://www.reportlinker.com/p097833/World-Pet-Foods-Market-Brief.html>.



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# INDUSTRY CALENDAR

## January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

**Global PETS Forum,** January 22-23, 2009, Amsterdam, Netherlands. Contact: Reinder Sterenborg, InterMedium Publishers b.v., Tel: +31.33.4225833, Fax: +1.31.33.4225838, www.petsinfo.net, www.gardeninternational.com.

**AFIA & PPFC Pet Food Regulatory and Technical Conference:**

## Understanding Emerging Trends in the Pet Food Industry,

January 27-28, 2009, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Contact: Alexa Stanco, AFIA, Tel: +1.703.558.3570, astanco@afia.org, www.petfoodconference.com.

**International Poultry and Feed Expo,** January 28-30, 2009, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Contact: IPE, Tel: +1.770.493.9401, expogeneralinfo@poultryegg.org, www.ipe09.org, www.ife09.org.

**India International Pet Trade Fair,** January 30-February 1, 2009, Delhi International Expocentre Noida, Delhi, India. Contact: Mr. Binoy Sahee, Tel: +1.91.120.240.1282, binoy@lbassociates.com, www.iipdf.com.

## February

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28

**19th Annual Feeds & Pet Food Extrusion Short Course,** February 1-6, 2009, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA. Contact: Dr. Mian Ruiz, Tel: +1.979.845.2774, Fax: +1.979.458.0019, mnriaz@tamu.edu, www.tamu.edu/extrusion.

**Global Pet Expo,** February 12-14, 2009, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida, USA. Contact: APPMA, Tel: +1.203.532.0000, Fax: +1.203.532.0551, globalpetexpo.org/contactus.asp, globalpetexpo.org.

## March

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	0	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

**ZooExpo,** March 21-22, 2009, Exporama Trade Fair Centre, Oslo, Norway. Contact: Norwegian Pet Trade Association (NZB), zooexpo@nzb.no, www.nzb.no.

A complete listing of 2009 events is available at [PetfoodIndustry.com](http://PetfoodIndustry.com)



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- Petfood politics – get in the game
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New

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April 22-23

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Registration date	Petfood Forum (full event)	One-day rate April 21, 2009	Exhibit-hall only pass	Petfood Workshop only	Petfood Workshop discounted rate if also registered for Forum
Prior to or on February 20, 2009	US\$855	\$515	US\$350	US\$645	\$505
After February 20, 2009	US\$995	US\$595	US\$350	US\$750	\$595

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Additional attendees \_\_\_\_\_

Organizational function (e.g., marketing, management, R&D, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Industry segment (e.g., manufacturer, supplier, government, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

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NOTE: Registrations will not be processed without payment. Rate is determined by date payment is received. Prior to February 20, 2009, attendee registration fees are refundable minus a cancellation fee; contact Jackie Thrash at [petfoodforum@meetingexpectations.com](mailto:petfoodforum@meetingexpectations.com) or +1.404.760.2823. Substitution of registered personnel is available at no charge. WATT Publishing Co. reserves the right to substitute speakers and change schedule as necessary. If anyone in your party requires special assistance, please contact us.

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Fax: +1.847.390.7100, [tleitner@wattnet.net](mailto:tleitner@wattnet.net).

## New on the Shelves

### Treat-stuffed dog toy >>

The Puppy Piñata is a plush dog toy stuffed with treats. Puppy Piñata treats are American-made products, according to the company. The toys come in bacon and natural beef jerky flavors, in 4- and 8-inch sizes, for small-medium or medium-large dogs. [www.puppy-pinata.com](http://www.puppy-pinata.com)



### << Pumpkin-flavored dog snacks

Thrive! Foods now offers Hip Health Pumpkin Spice snacks as part of its SuperTreats line. According to the company, the snacks contain antioxidants, beta-carotene, turmeric, ginger and cinnamon, designed to increase hip health and the immune system. The snacks come in an 8-ounce resealable pouch. [www.getdoghealth.com](http://www.getdoghealth.com)

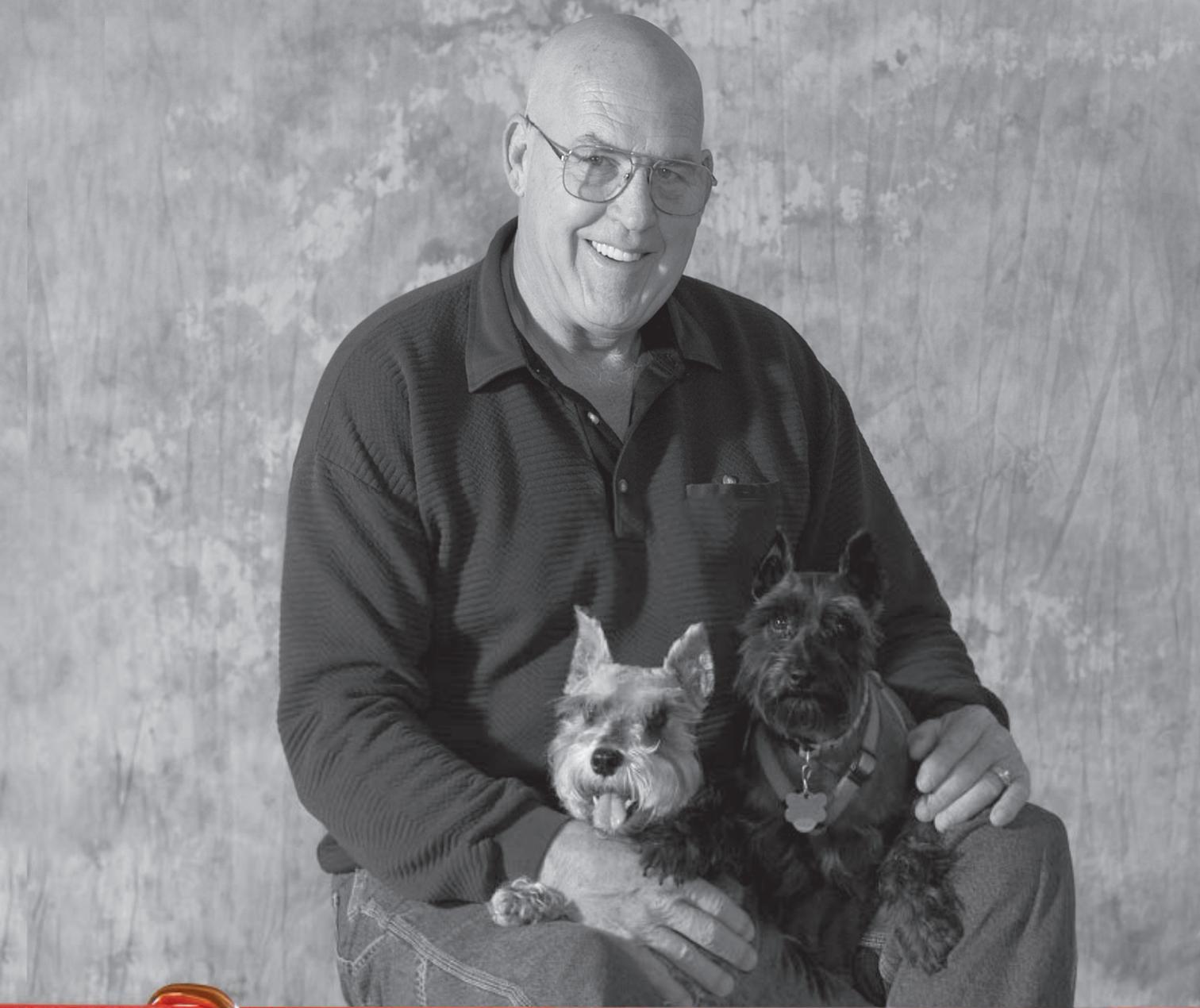
### Grow your own pet greens >>

Bell Rock Growers offers Pet Greens Garden, self-grown wheat grass for pets. The grass grows directly out of the packaging and is ready in seven to 10 days after watering. According to the company, the greens can be used for dogs, cats, birds, reptiles and other small animals. Greens can aid in hairball digestion for cats, maintain healthy teeth and gums for dogs, serve as a treat for birds and provide calcium for reptiles, according to Bell Rock. [www.bellrockgrowers.com](http://www.bellrockgrowers.com)



### << Salmon oil

Arctic Paws LLC, makers of Yummy Chummies Wild Alaska Salmon Dog Treats, offers Yummy Chummies Wild Alaska Salmon Oil, designed to improve the palatability of petfood. The oil is cold-pressed and made from wild Alaska salmon, which is rich in omega 3 and 6 essential fatty acids, according to the company. The product is available in 8-, 16- and 32-ounce pump bottles. [www.yummychummies.com](http://www.yummychummies.com)



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# Rachael Ray innovates with Dad's

The celebrity chef has created dog food and treat recipes for her Nutrish line

BY TIM PHILLIPS, DVM

## Business basics

**Headquarters:** Meadville, Pennsylvania, USA (where the company has three plants)

**Officers:** Sean Lang, president/CEO; Doug Lang, executive VP of sales and marketing; Jeff Lang, nutrition research director

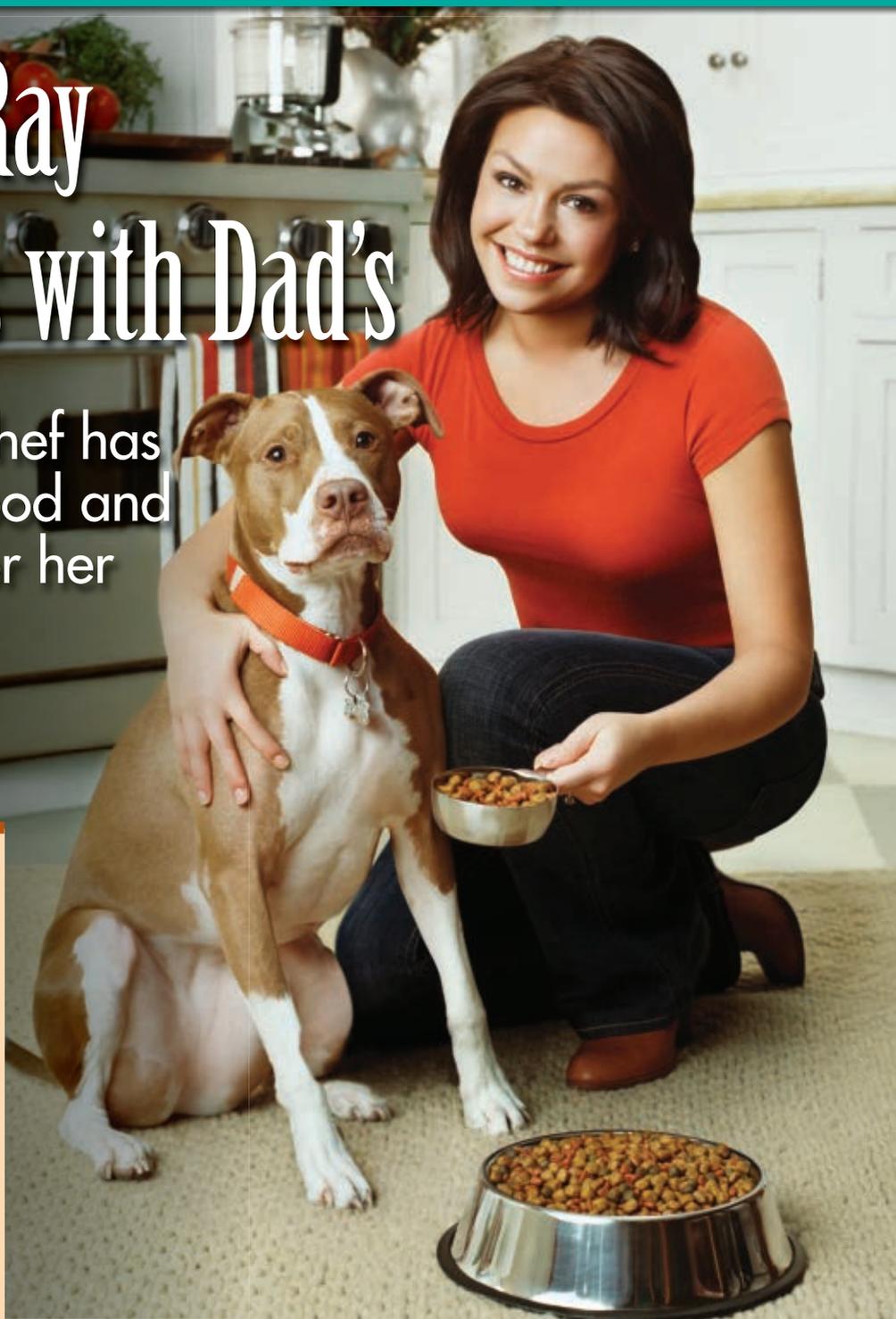
**Brands:** Rachael Ray Nutrish, Isaboo soft & chewy treats, Isaboo booscotti, plus many Dad's corporate and co-pack brands

**Annual sales:** The company's compound annual sales growth from 2001 through 2008 has been +10%. Dad's has more than doubled its annual sales in the last five years

**Distribution:** Dad's brands are in 24 states; Rachael Ray Nutrish is distributed nationally

**Employees:** 200

**Website:** [www.dadspetcare.com](http://www.dadspetcare.com); [www.rachaelray.com/pets/nutrish.php](http://www.rachaelray.com/pets/nutrish.php)



Celebrity chef Rachael Ray digs dogs. She likes them so much that she has launched Nutrish, her own line of dry dog foods and treats. The products are produced by Dad's Pet Care in Meadville, Pennsylvania, USA, a company founded in 1933.

Doug Lang, executive vice president

of sales and marketing at Dad's, notes that Rachael Ray Nutrish is the first mainstream dry dog food, distributed nationally, that is formulated with meat-first and no chicken by-product meals, artificial flavors, colors or preservatives. It is available in 14-lb. and 6-lb. sizes and two flavors: Chicken & Veggies and Beef & Brown Rice.

Dad's has just finished its first branded launch into the superpremium world with Rachael Ray Nutrish.

## Recipes from Ray

Nutrish treats are named after Ray's beloved dog Isaboo and were inspired by recipes from Ray. The soft & chewy treats are called Isaboo Burger Bites and are available in two flavors: Beef & Bacon. The crunchy treats are called Isaboo Booscotti and are available in two varieties: Peanut Butter & Bacon.

In addition to filling a unique consumer need in the world of superpremium dog food, all of Rachael Ray's proceeds are donated to help pets in need through a program called Rachael's Rescue. Dad's is just now filling the pipeline so does not yet have detailed information as to how the brand is doing, but early indications are very good.

Lang says Dad's efforts have been focused on creating new petfoods and snacks that fill specific consumer needs not met with products currently on the market. New product development has been aggressive not only for its branded portfolio but also for its corporate brand and co-pack businesses.

## Innovative thinking

Dad's is not at liberty to speak about current co-pack partners, says Lang, but he maintains its new product development work provides clients with innovative strategic thinking, R&D and manufacturing capabilities. The company's unique proposition to retailers in the world of corporate brands is to treat their brands like its own, he says.

Dad's emphasis in new product development is to provide offerings for branded portfolios

In addition to the Nutrish line of dog foods and treats, Dad's Pet Care produces dozens of its own brands. Those will soon include a new treat with unique benefits.

that attract new consumers to brands. For example, Dad's most recent offering is a high-quality, all-natural dry dog food.

## Keys to growth

Lang says the company's keys to growth are "innovation, service and an independent perspective that serves the needs of all of our customers."

Innovation is an ongoing pursuit in all areas of our company, says Lang. Most important is finding opportunity gaps with consumers and bringing those products to life through innovative marketing, R&D and manufacturing solutions.

Lang says all Dad's employees pride themselves on service and recognize the importance of bringing efficiency to customers' supply chains. The company strives to be an advocate for petfood consumers and is not influenced by the short-term needs of Wall Street, since it is a privately held company. This enables Dad's to take a longer-term view of the business and provide entrepreneurial solutions to customers.

"Our people and our passion for pets set us apart from the competition,"

says Lang. "Our sole focus is petfood. Our attention is never diverted by other products or markets. Most of us have pets in our family and have a deep-rooted passion to best serve their needs." Dad's compound annual sales growth rate from 2001 through the estimated end of 2008 is +10%.

## Focus on new segments

The company believes its business model will foster continued strong

**The biggest opportunities will come from continued innovation in new product development.**

growth. Its biggest opportunities will come from continued innovation in new product development and a focus on emerging and existing consumer segments where it is not currently competing. A commitment to consumer research to identify market opportunities will continue to serve as the foundation for new product development, says Lang.

The petfood industry is very healthy, contends Lang. Even during tougher economic times, consumers are not readily cutting costs by compromising what they believe is important for their pets (just as they would approach the needs of their children).

Significant growth will continue at the high-end of the market; however, there may be some channel shifting with consumers looking for key product attributes at a better price. The value end of the market will also grow due to increased consumer confidence, private label growth and shifting to value formats like DG and Aldi.



Dad's recently celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and is the oldest, privately owned petfood company in the US.

### Proud of accomplishments

In addition to its first branded launch into the superpremium world with Rachael Ray Nutrish, Dad's is on the verge

of bringing a new pet treat to market that will deliver benefits not seen in market before, notes Lang.

Dad's is proud that it has leveraged both existing and new people to bring a fresh perspective to the market, says Lang. And he notes the need for greater speed to market has required Dad's to

make efficiency, food safety and information technology core competencies.

Dad's biggest challenges include the impact of government policies on commodities and dealing with a post-recall world and its impact on food safety concerns. Although none of Dad's products were affected by the recall, the company saw it as opportunity to further upgrade its food-safety protocol.

Even prior to the recall, contends Lang, Dad's ingredients screening protocols were a top priority. The recall, though, further emphasized the importance of getting to know suppliers, requiring and routinely examining Certificates of Analysis and Letters of Guarantee, and upgrading supplier selection and monitoring procedures.

Dad's regularly reviews its food-safety protocols such as raw materials screening, inspection and documentation; supplier audits; internal audits; personnel training; and crisis management. Lang asserts that Dad's is in the petfood industry for the long haul and will be a key player for another 75 years. ●

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## How it started

In 1933, George "Dad" Lang's Springer had a surprisingly large litter of pups—11! At the time, commercial dog food cost five cents a pound, and work (if you could find it) paid 40 cents an hour. To avoid going broke feeding his new pups, George tried making his own dog food. With an old peanut roaster, he combined "Dad's Health Wheat" (a product his father was then selling) with meat meal.

The result was a biscuit the dogs thrived on. Dad's Pet Care has since grown into a petfood manufacturer with distribution in 24 states. The Lang family still owns and operates Dad's Pet Care from its Meadville, Pennsylvania, USA plant. "Generations of championship dogs fed Dad's affirm its commitment to the best nutrition," says Doug Lang.



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Pet superstore chains, such as Petco in the US and Fressnapf in Western Europe, are creating their own private label premium petfoods.

# Private label bounces back

## Sales rebound on strong growth in Eastern Europe and a rise in pet superstores

BY DEBBIE PHILLIPS-DONALDSON

**A**re private label petfoods getting back on track? After softening between 2003 and 2006, sales of these products resurged in 2007, reaching 11% of overall global market shares, according to Euromonitor International. (End of 2007 are the latest data available.)

Though private label's growth was small—up from 10.6% at the end of 2006—that compares favorably to three of the five top global petfood companies that lost value share from 2006 to 2007 (Figure 1).

Euromonitor attributes the private label growth to three key factors:

1. Prevalence of these products in Western Europe, North America and Australasia.
2. Robust growth in developing regions, especially Eastern Europe.
3. A surge in the pet specialty retail channel, particular pet superstores, which are creating their own premium private label petfoods.

### Figure 1: Global petfood market shares, 2006 vs. 2007

Final 2007 data from Euromonitor International show that private label petfoods grew their share of the market slightly from the previous year, as did Mars and Colgate-Palmolive. Other companies saw their shares decline.

Company/segment	2006 global market share	2007 global market share
Mars Inc.	24.6%	25.6%
Nestle SA	24.1%	23.7%
Other	21.1%	23%
Private label	10.6%	11%
Colgate Palmolive Co.	6.4%	6.5%
Procter & Gamble Co.	6.6%	6.5%
Del Monte Foods Co.	3.9%	3.7%

### Regional strength

Western Europe is king of private label products, which held a 13.6% share of that region's pet market—double that of one of the leading brands, Whiskas from Mars, at 6.1%. That private label share (including all pet products, not just petfoods) translated into sales of US\$3.05 billion (Figure 2).

In North America, private label products comprised 8.9% of the pet market, with US\$2.19 billion in sales. Private label also captured a healthy market share in other regions but at much lower sales totals because of those markets' relatively smaller size. For example, Middle East/Africa's 8.7% private label share amounted to only US\$41.2 million.

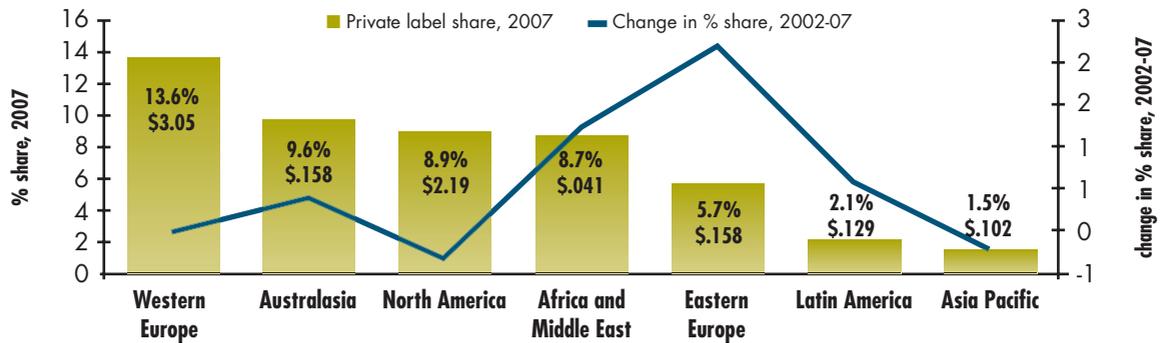
### Two types of success

Though private label sales in Middle East/Africa may not be large yet, that region is one of the fastest growing for these pet products (Figure 2). But no region is enjoying as sharp a growth rate for private label as Eastern Europe. According to Euromonitor, private label's share of all pet products in this region rose by two full percentage points between 2002 and 2007.

The reasons behind this growth in Eastern Europe are very different from what's underpinning the strength in developed regions. In Western Europe

**Figure 2: Private label share by region, 2002-2007**

Private label petfood and pet care products are most prevalent in developed regions such as Western Europe, Australasia and North America—but Eastern Europe is the fastest growing region. *Source: Euromonitor International.*



\*Dollar amounts are in US billions.

Source: Euromonitor International

and North America, supermarket and “hypermarket” chains—which control 35% of pet retail—have created their own private label premium petfoods. So have pet superstore chains such as Petco and PetSmart in the US.

Eastern European pet owners tend to be price sensitive and have very low brand loyalty, Euromonitor says. This creates an opportunity for value-priced private label petfoods. Many domestic petfood manufacturers are smaller

companies without the resources to invest in advertising to raise brand awareness, so they see manufacturing private label products for major retailers as a way to gain market share and grow profitably.

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## Huge retail impact

The pet retail sector has a huge impact on the private label petfood market. While supermarkets and hypermarkets may still have the largest share in pet retail, Euromonitor says pet specialty shops and superstores have increased their share almost three percentage

points in the last five years—from 21.2% in 2003 to 24.2% in 2008.

Much of that growth has come from aggressive expansion by the Germany-based Fressnapf chain, which included 919 pet superstores throughout Western Europe as of June 2008. That total represents a nearly 40% increase since



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## Western Europe is king of private label products, with a 13.6% share of that region's pet market.

just 2006. The 10,000 items in a typical Fressnapf store include its premium private label dog and cat food brands.

### What lies ahead

Despite the current global economic woes, most experts predict pet ownership will continue to increase, especially in developing regions, as incomes rise and owners seek better, healthier food for their pets. Trends driving petfood growth in developed regions—humanization, premiumization, health and wellness—will become more of a factor around the world.

In that environment, Euromonitor predicts private label manufacturers will increasingly target the premium segment. Pet superstores will continue to play a key role, using their brand equity to drive private label sales. ●

*Based on reports and presentations from Euromonitor ([www.euromonitor.com](http://www.euromonitor.com)).*

### Find more online!

View Lee Linthicum's (of Euromonitor) Petfood Forum 2008 presentation on the private label market, [www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETprivate.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETprivate.aspx).

Hear audio clips of Linthicum's presentation, [www.petfoodindustry.com/PlayRadio.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/PlayRadio.aspx).

Read "The rise of petfood retailing," [www.petfoodindustry.com/0808PETretail](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/0808PETretail).

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# Consumers' online clout

## How Web review communities are reshaping petfood marketing

BY JOE DYSART

### Take a proactive approach

Consider setting up your own review community. One of the leading service providers, Bazaarvoice ([www.bazaarvoice.com](http://www.bazaarvoice.com)), builds review communities and urges transparency. Its "Ratings & Reviews" module is designed to solicit unvarnished reviews that are published on your website, subject to your approval.

If you're skittish about publishing bad reviews of your products on your own site, you may be more interested in a solution like Genuosity's (<http://www.genuosity.com>) Kudos-Works or Zuberance (<http://www.zuberance.com>). They solicit glowing testimonials from extremely enthusiastic customers.

If you're not ready for any of these choices, business and financial experts advise you to still monitor what's being said about your products online. Service providers to evaluate include:

- Factiva Insight: Reputation Intelligence (<http://www.factiva.com/factivainsight/reputation/>);
- Nielsen-Online (<http://www.nielsen-online.com/>);
- BlogSquirrel (<http://www.cyberalert.com/blogmonitoring.html>); and
- WebClipping.com (<http://www.webclipping.com>).

While Web marketers have long been tracking the growing influence of online consumer reviews, a study released in June from Opinion Research reveals the impact of these reviews has reached a tipping point (<http://www.reuters.com/article/pressrelease/idUS117426+24-Jun-2008+BW20080624>).

The study found 83% of online shoppers said the evaluations and reviews they find on the Web are now influencing their purchasing decisions. Another 32% said they had posted feedback or a review of a product or service online.

"It's nearly impossible to escape being evaluated—there's nowhere to hide," says Linda Shea, a senior vice president at Opinion Research. "Even a single negative review posted in a very public forum can have a significant impact on a prospective buyer's decision."

### Thousands of reviews

Besides numerous blogs, there are many independent consumer review sites rating the petfood industry. You'll find thousands of reviews of petfood products on sites such as:

- HubPages ([http://hubpages.com/hub/Pet\\_Food\\_Ratings](http://hubpages.com/hub/Pet_Food_Ratings));
- Zootoo (<http://www.zootoo.com/petproducts/>); and
- Buzzillions ([http://www.buzzillions.com/4294966280\\_nz\\_pet\\_food\\_reviews](http://www.buzzillions.com/4294966280_nz_pet_food_reviews)).



Zootoo is a consumer-powered review site for petfood.

Online retailers, including Petco (<http://reviews.petco.com/3554/68386/category.htm>) and Dog-Foods.org (<http://www.dog-foods.org/>), now include reviews along with product descriptions. Manufacturers like ProPac (<http://www.propacpetfood.com/testimonials/index.tpl>) and Old Mother Hubbard ([http://www.wellnesspetfood.com/news\\_2-1-2008.html](http://www.wellnesspetfood.com/news_2-1-2008.html)) are also getting in on the act.

Interestingly, some review site pioneers—heavyweight online retailers Amazon, eMusic and eBay—have decided to embrace reviews on their sites that are both positive and negative. These companies buy into the "brave new Web" theory that a company demonstrating complete transparency earns the greatest respect—and most repeat business—from today's sophisticated online shoppers. Other sites seem convinced that by posting only glowing reviews, they'll be able to look trendy while bringing in more business.

### Cost-effective feedback

Plenty of service providers specialize in the online review space to help com-



**ProPac plays it safe with positive-only reviews.**

panies build and manage online review domains or bring in turn-key systems that can be managed in-house.

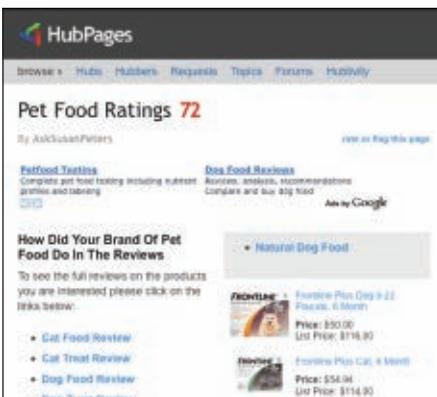
“Blogs, discussion boards and other forms of interactive media are the most cost-effective customer feedback mechanism ever invented,” says Paul Gillin, author of *The New Influencers: A Marketer’s Guide to the New Social Media*.

Generally, these online review communities fall into three categories:

1. Social hang-outs (think MySpace or Facebook), which offer a review domain component;
2. Completely private, invitation-only sites; and
3. Communities that exist solely to solicit reviews from extremely happy customers.

**Cloning MySpace**

Most popular are communities borrowing from the MySpace and Facebook model. Web marketers say you’ll only be able to achieve that look and feel



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by offering a full array of community fostering features, including discussion boards, chatrooms, instant messaging, blogs, photo, audio and video posting.

You'll also want to jump-start the community's nerve center—the discussion board—by posting commentary on a dozen or so topics, then encouraging

visitors to offer reactions and opinions to the discussions you've started.

Providers specializing in MySpace-type communities include Affinitive (<http://www.beaffinitive.com>), Webcrossing (<http://www.webcrossing.com>) and Capable Networks (<http://www.capablenetworks.com>).

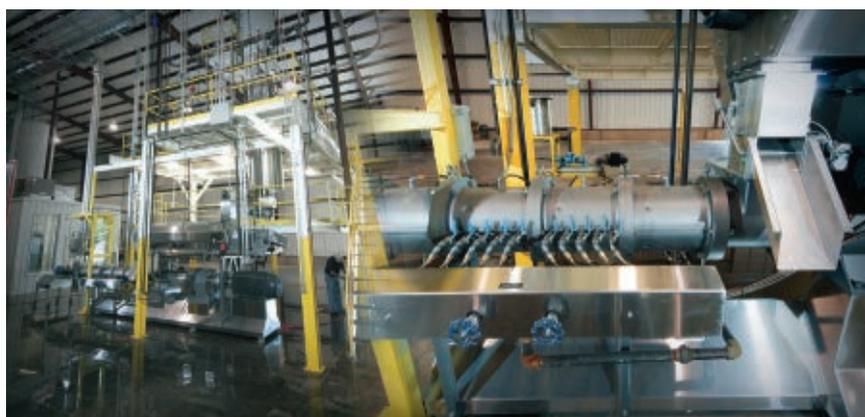
## By invitation only

Communispace, an online community service provider that specializes in designing and helping companies run private meeting places, can help you build an invitation-only review site ([www.communispace.com](http://www.communispace.com)). While these are generally much smaller than public sites, many firms have discovered a big pay-off when they choose who will belong to their review community.



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**Petco has begun to use online consumer reviews aggressively.**

## For the company

Some of the biggest names in business—including Dell, Macy's, Sears, Charles Schwab and PepsiCo—have sites that limit all review activity to public evaluation of the company's products and services. Many of these communities are driven by highly sophisticated review software packages, which walk visitors through every step of the process and encourage them to expound.

No matter which type of review community appeals to you, such gathering places will likely continue to appear. "Expect at least one-quarter of the *Fortune* 100 to announce online communities," says Brad Bortner, co-author of *Top Market Researcher Predictions for 2008* from Forrester.

*Joe Dysart is a speaker and business consultant in New York City, New York, USA, [www.joedysart.com](http://www.joedysart.com).*

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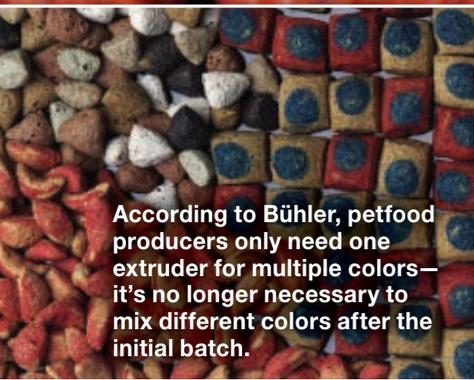


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According to Bühler, petfood producers only need one extruder for multiple colors—it's no longer necessary to mix different colors after the initial batch.

# Extrusion advances

## Multi-colored, multi-shaped and multi-textured is where the future of petfood extrusion is heading

BY JESSICA TAYLOR

**P**rocesses become more efficient when efforts are simplified through a single tool or machine to handle multiple tasks at once. The big names in extrusion have latched on to this idea over the past year, offering machines that can handle both treats and food simultaneously (Extru-Tech Inc.), multiple colors and shapes (Bühler) and multiple textures (Wenger).

### Where treats and food meet

Well-established petfood producers often want a slice of the pet treats market to bolster their position in our industry—and their profits. According to Extru-Tech, it's easy to see why: Margins are typically more attractive than those

for even premium petfood. To grow this ever expanding market, manufacturers need a way to maintain current production of petfood while adding plant time and equipment for treat production, all without causing great financial risk. That's why Extru-Tech has recently introduced the Model E975 Extruder.

The June issue of *The Extru-Technician* ([www.extru-tech-digital.com/extrutech/200806](http://www.extru-tech-digital.com/extrutech/200806)) summarizes three main objectives of the E975 design:

1. Increase pumping capability;
2. Increase control of the "cook"; and
3. Develop a function of versatility.

The first two objectives apply directly to pet treat processing, while the last

item will help manufacturers maintain current production load with the same machine, according to Extru-Tech.

This particular extruder has been developed to first support the manufacturing of simple to complex treats from single screw extrusion, but with enough versatility to support manufacturing of products such as dry expanded feeds—simple through premium—thus providing better and faster return on investment. The E975 also features a

### Online extra!

See Clextral's extrusion innovations at [www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETClextral.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/0812PETClextral.aspx).

And visit [www.andritzsprout.com](http://www.andritzsprout.com).



Available in a variety of configurations to allow for tailoring the number of product colors and product shapes in a single production run, Wenger and Extru-Tech's die technologies are versatile.

very good capacity rating on expanded products using a very low horsepower motor, according to Extru-Tech, lowering energy costs.

### Different textures, same batch

Simultaneous production of petfoods with multiple textures, according to Wenger, offers petfood and treat producers an opportunity to produce petfoods with many marketing implications, such as:

- Dental care attributes;
- Breed-specific textures; and
- Age-appropriate textures.

The Multi-Color/Multi-Shape Die System was introduced last year by Extru-Tech Inc. for single screw extruders. Wenger recently introduced similar technology (Mixing Head Die System) specifically designed for twin screw extruders. These die technologies allow the revolutionary and simultaneous production of finished product with multiple colors and multiple shapes by eliminating the need for post-run mixing and blending, according to the companies. They are available in a variety of configurations—two- three- and four-color—to allow for tailoring the number of product colors and product shapes in a single production run.

By varying the operating parameters and recipe components, the Multi-Color/Multi-Shape technology can now be expanded to include multi-textured product options. Examples of textural differences of kibbles achieved in a dry-expanded petfood are summarized in Figure 1, where hardness was measured as the maximum peak force required to crush a kibble. Simultaneous extrusion of dry petfood kibbles having two

different textures was accomplished by varying glycerin levels, fat levels or die assembly temperature, according to Galen J. Rokey, process technology manager at Wenger.

### What can twin screw do for you?

Pete Ferrara, Bühler's petfood market manager, explained the company's main focus during the last year was to add additional functionalities to its twin screw family. The company did this by improving and redesigning its Bi-Color, Dual Color, Marbled Petfood System and introducing the Multi-Color Sys-

tem for Petfood. Both systems can be attached to Bühler's twin screw extruders and are controlled by the extruder BCTB control system. But what are the benefits of getting different products out of one machine?

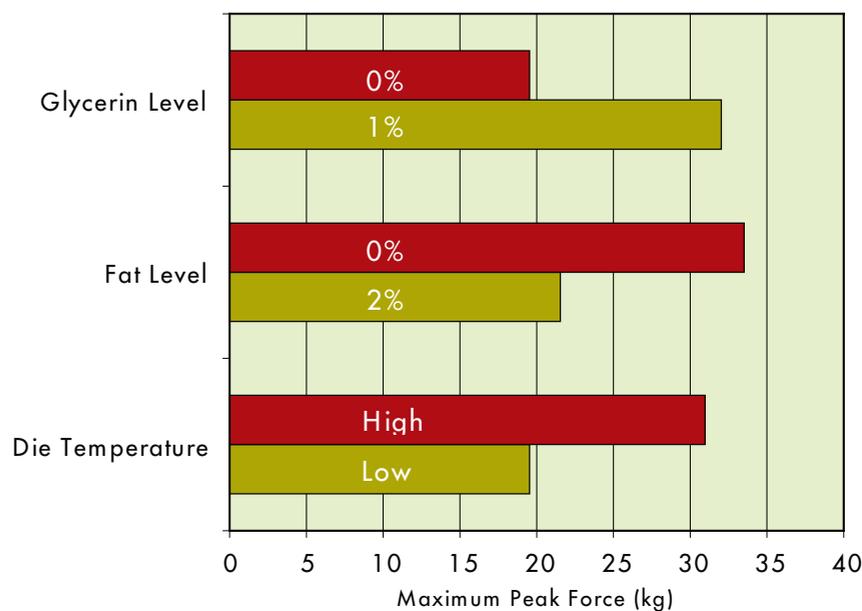
- Two colors with one extruder (bi-color);
- Up to six colors with one extruder (multi-color);
- Two colors in one shape/pellet (dual color); and
- Two colors marbled in one pellet (marbled system).

According to Bühler, producers only need one extruder for multiple colors; it's no longer necessary to mix different colors after the initial batch; and it reduces abrasion of pellets and broken kibble.

With an accurate control system, all key data can be visualized for immediate control (trending) and stored for traceability, according to Bühler. Temperature sensors placed in different spots can control the process and regulate the target temperature from the preconditioner through the cutting assembly. ●

**Figure 1. Summary of textural differences in kibbles**

Simultaneous extrusion of dry petfood kibbles having two different textures, where hardness was measured as the maximum peak force, was accomplished by varying three factors, according to this data from Wenger.



# 'New' APPA discusses regulatory issues

**I**n early October, I attended the H.H. Backer Christmas 2008 Show in Chicago, Illinois, USA. Like other pet trade shows such as Global Pet Expo (GPE), the main function of the Backer show is for pet product companies to showcase their products to prospective buyers from retail firms. As I understand it, Backer is a bit smaller than GPE, but walking up and down the rows and rows of exhibit booths was still a daunting task.

While I enjoyed the exhibits tremendously, that was not my purpose there. Rather, I was participating in a meeting of the American Pet Products Association (APPA). For those who do not recognize the acronym, until recently this organization was known as the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA). The name was changed recently to better reflect the association's diverse membership.

## Fish tanks to petfood

I have been serving as the petfood consultant to APPA for the past couple of years. While its membership includes manufacturers and distributors of many different types of pet products—from fish tanks to bird toys to dog beds to cat jewelry—a significant proportion of the membership deals with petfoods, treats, chews and

**Understanding recent changes was the main purpose of a meeting during the Backer trade show.**



— David Dzanis

supplements. With all the recent developments in the regulatory arena concerning both the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO), many of these members had questions about how these issues will affect their businesses. That was the purpose of the meeting during the Backer show.

The meeting also was to serve as a forum to discuss matters of mutual concern regarding the current regulatory environment. Many, but not all, APPA members can be classified as small to medium-sized companies. Some of these smaller industry players worry their interests and concerns are not sufficiently known to regulators; hence these companies' needs may not be considered as governmental bodies ponder the issues.

## And AAFCO, too

The meeting was well attended, with representatives of about 30 APPA member companies participating. I gave what I predicted would be a short presentation on emerging regulatory issues, but with all the questions, my 16 PowerPoint slides

took nearly an hour to get through! This included discussion of the FDA Amendments Act of 2007 (FDAAA) and how it could affect petfood manufacturing and labeling. Tangential to this issue was discussion of the FDA Animal Feed Safety System and



**The new name of the American Pet Products Association is intended to reflect the diversity of its members.**

other matters such as FDA's pending guidance regarding glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate.

AAFCO was not left out of the discussion. FDA and AAFCO have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) wherein FDA has assumed greater authority over the AAFCO feed ingredient definition process. AAFCO is also developing regulations to institute good manufac-

### Background reading

FDA Amendments Act of 2007, [www.petfoodindustry.com/0712PETinsight.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/0712PETinsight.aspx)

FDA and AAFCO MOU, [www.petfoodindustry.com/0801PETinsight.aspx](http://www.petfoodindustry.com/0801PETinsight.aspx)

turing practices (GMPs) for all animal feeds, including petfoods and treats. (Currently, only medicated feeds and canned foods are subject to GMPs.)

The discussion also covered:

- ▶ The pending revision of AAFCO's *Dog and Cat Food Nutrient Profiles*;
- ▶ Potential changes in feeding trial protocols; and
- ▶ Possible mandatory calorie content statements for dog and cat foods.

During and after the presentation, the attendees were all engaged in the discussion. Other subjects included the Federal Trade Commission's guidance

may use this meeting to evaluate and express its views on these issues.

APPA members can obtain a copy of the slide presentation by contacting APPA's regulatory group at [ed@americanpetproducts.org](mailto:ed@americanpetproducts.org). Non-members can visit APPA's new website at [www.americanpetproducts.org](http://www.americanpetproducts.org). ●

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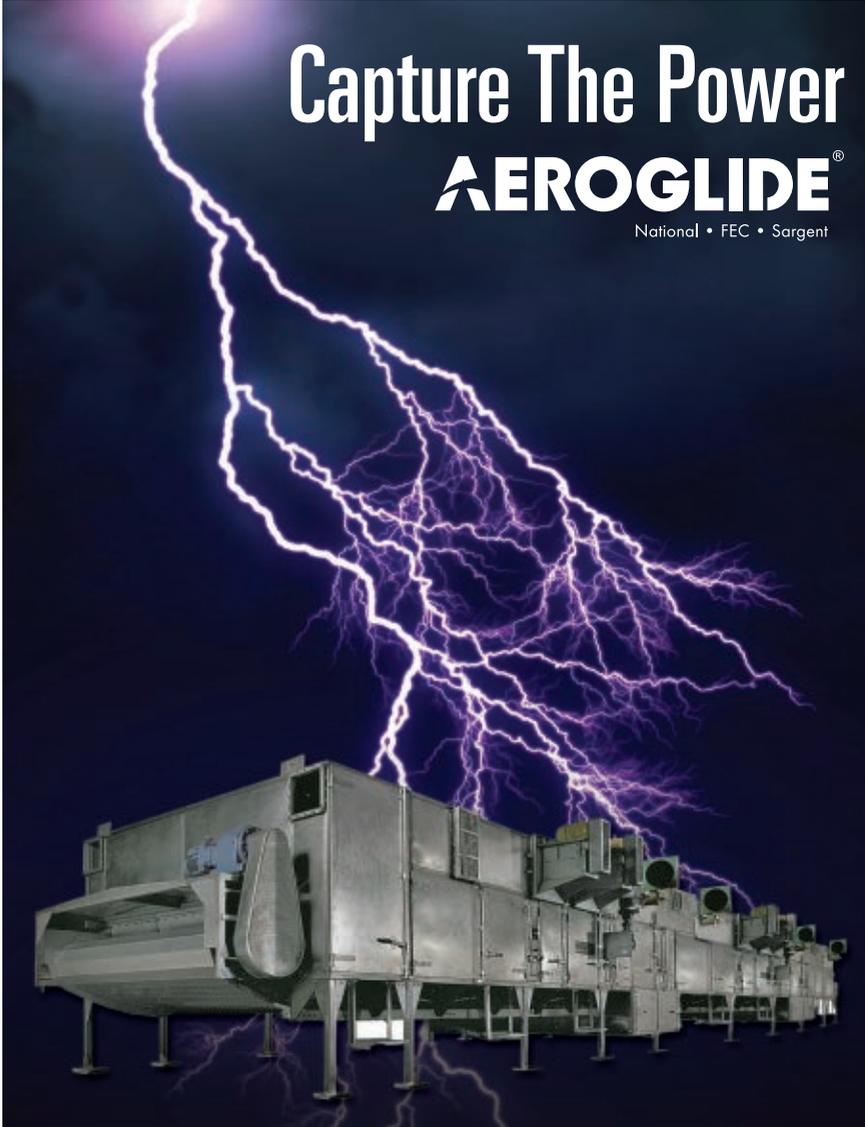
*Dr. Dzanis is a writer and independent consultant on veterinary nutrition, labeling and regulation. He can be reached at Tel: +1.661.251.3543, Fax: +1.661.251.3203, E-mail: [dzanis@aol.com](mailto:dzanis@aol.com).*

## Some of these smaller industry players worry their interests and concerns are not sufficiently known to regulators.

for "made in USA" claims and the US Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program. One hot topic was "no by-product" claims—specifically some APPA members recently experiencing more inclusive interpretation by many state feed control officials regarding what constitutes a by-product.

### Next steps

There is thought of continuing this forum in the future, including possibly a similar meeting during GPE in February 2009. Depending on the timing of any new developments regarding the FDAAA or other matters, the group



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## Carrageenan: for appearance's sake only?

**I**n the world of food for pets, no different than with food for people, there are a number of additives used to enhance a product's presentation—some obvious and some not. One less obvious ingredient used in canned food applications is carrageenan. This ingredient is added to help form a loaf (meatloaf), retain moisture in the loaf and bind the contents together so they slide from the can intact. This ingredient is often lumped into the category of gels and thickeners, which “foodies” call hydrocolloids.

Carrageenan's sole purpose is to enhance the appearance of the product and create a consistent mix of meat and other ingredients from top to bottom. But exactly what is this quiet, unassuming ingredient, and should it be there?

### Irish Moss

The name carrageenan may be new to many, but the ingredient has been around quite a while. The earliest applications were reported some 600 years ago as a seaweed extract from *Chondrus crispus*, also known as Irish Moss, used to gel milk products.

Carrageenan didn't become a commercially viable ingredient until after World War II. Today it is found in a wide variety of foods. Most akin to petfoods are applications in processed meats wherein carrageenan is used to increase moisture content and provide mouth feel and texture, especially in low-fat meats.

### Red seaweed

Like most food hydrocolloids (hydrophilic colloid), carrageenan is a branched-chain carbohydrate.

**What is this quiet, unassuming ingredient, and should it be there?**

— Greg Aldrich



It is a galactan sugar extract from red seaweed. In the *AAFCO Official Publication 2008*, it is listed under title 87.5 as an “additional special purpose product” and is classified under the food additives amendment as an “emulsifier, stabilizer or thickener for petfoods.”

The exact FDA regulation 21CFR172.620 describes carrageenan as “...the refined hydrocolloid prepared by aqueous extraction from members of the families *Gigartinales* and *Solieriales* of the class *Rhodophyceae* (red seaweed).”

Seaweed from these various species and from various regions of the world are harvested from the sea or estuaries by boat, dried at nearby processing plants, washed and macerated in hot alkaline solution. The alkali helps form 3,6-anhydro-D-galactose, which is essential to gel formation. After alkaline extraction, the material undergoes various cleaning, concentrating, drying, sizing and standardizing steps.

### Kappa, iota, lambda

The seaweed extract, carrageenan, has a molecular weight of 100,000 to 1 million, consists of linear galactan polysaccharides with alternating (1→3) and (1→4) β-D-glycosidic linkages and has an ester sulfate content of 15-40%. Three types are commercially available that vary in the number of anhydro-linkages and sulfate groups:

1. Kappa (κ);
2. Iota (ι); and
3. Lambda (λ).

The three types don't exist singly but are sold as mixtures with one type predominating. These mixtures are influenced by species, habitat and harvesting conditions.

Petfood principally uses κ-carrageenan because it survives retort, forms a strong but brittle gel and is stable to pH just under 4. The κ-carrageenan is strongest in the presence of potassium ions, which create an aggregate (like rocks in cement) with the polygalactan coils, and also works in synergy with other hydrocolloids like locust bean gum. This type of carrageenan is commonly used at less than 1% of the formula.

The ι-carrageenan is similar in many respects to κ-carrageenan but forms an elastic gel, which is strength-

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ened by calcium ions and does not interact synergistically with other hydrocolloids. The  $\lambda$ -carrageenan does not create a gel but acts as a thickener.

### Petfood applications

In canned meat products the exact mode of action that allows for carrageenan to serve as a gel is not completely understood, but it is thought that the gel interacts directly with proteins in the meat system (Trius and Sebranek, 1996). In wet petfood applications, carrageenan has been reported to be superior to animal plasma, egg albumen and wheat gluten (Polo *et al.*, 2005). For dogs, the use of gelling agents such as a combination of guar/carrageenan had a positive impact on diet digestibility and stool quality remained good, but stool output increased slightly (Karr-Lilienthal *et al.*, 2002).

The soluble fiber in canned foods from sources such as carrageenan may account for part of the reason that cats

## The earliest applications were reported some 600 years ago.

need more taurine in canned foods. The theory is that increased taurine degradation by intestinal flora occurs due to greater fermentation as more soluble fiber (of which carrageenan would qualify) reaches the colon (Anantharaman-Barr *et al.*, 1994).

There have been a few reports that carrageenan may be carcinogenic. But in long-term bioassays, carrageenan has not been found to be carcinogenic, and there is no credible evidence

supporting a carcinogenic effect or a tumor-promoting effect on the colon in rodents, humans or dogs.

### Needed: expertise

A vast body of information explains the safety and utility of this naturally occurring gelling agent. Carrageenan is very effective at providing form and texture to meat-based wet petfoods at low concentrations, and pets seem to do well nutritionally on products that contain it. While it may seem simple, just the right mixture (kappa, iota and lambda) is unlikely right off the shelf. A technician with experience and ties to a consistent carrageenan supply base will be required. ●

*Dr. Greg Aldrich is president of Pet Food & Ingredient Technology, Inc., which facilitates innovations in foods and ingredients for companion animals.*

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## Economy's impact on petfood

**W**hen top economic experts agree the economy is in its worst state since the Great Depression, it's hard to be bullish on just about any industry. With each passing day, the litany of negative financial indicators seems to get longer, adding to a sense of unease.

According to the US Conference Board's monthly Consumer Confidence Survey, the consumer confidence index stood at 59.8 in September 2008, compared with 99.5 in September 2007 and 105.9 in September 2006. The forward-looking "expectations index" was at 60.5, a low not seen the past decade.

But it's not just that US consumers lack confidence in the economy: They are afraid. The US has seen not just one but a series of generation-defining events, from the 2001 terrorist attacks on US soil to Hurricane Katrina's devastation of much of the Mississippi Gulf Coast to the current economic crisis.

### Rising pet ownership

This combination of factors makes any predictions about the 2009 fortunes of US petfood sales speculative at best. But the sum total does, Packaged Facts believes, represent an opportunity for the US\$50 billion pet products market to strengthen its

foundation of the 54.4 million US households who own dogs or cats. As discussed in a new report on the US petfood market (see box at bottom), ownership rates for both dogs and cats have been edging up, from 45.4% in 2003 to 48.6% in 2008, with the number of dog- or cat-owning households increasing by nearly 5 million (Figure 1).

For a non-discretionary category like petfood, this is good news, especially if some pet owners do temporarily scale back to less expensive brands and shopping venues.

### Bond breeds security

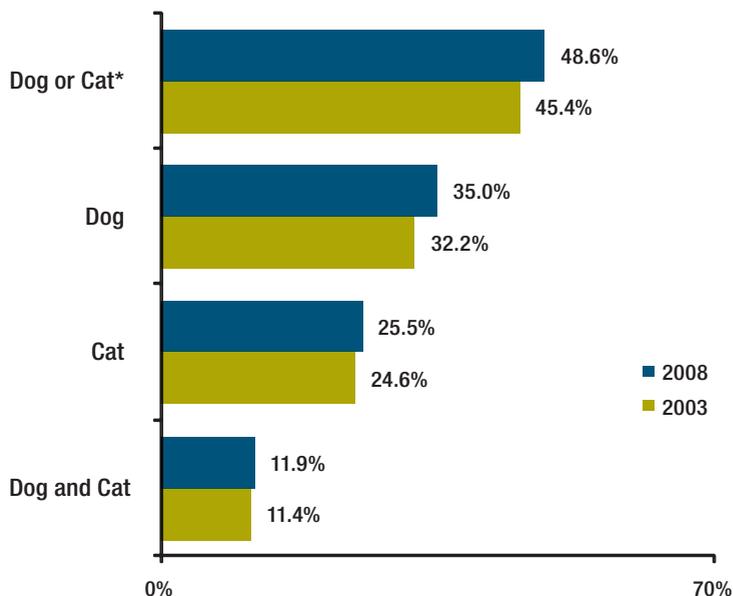
At least part of this upward trend in December derives from the human need for companionship and security inherent in pet ownership; this need increases during times of external turmoil. Indeed, the advent of the rise of humanization as the primary (and extremely effective) marketing theme in pet product advertising seems to correlate with the turn of this century and the events of 9/11.

For many people in the US, the response to these events has been turning to home and family. Now more than ever, pets are part of the family and a unifying bridge to a larger community. At this time in history, it's up to each petfood industry participant to understand the wants and needs of the US pet owner. *Carpe diem* (seize the day) in a way that brings out the best in all of us. ●

**Figure 1: US ownership of dogs and cats, 2003 vs. 2008**

**US households owning at least one dog or one cat have increased between 2003 and 2008. Percentages are based on a total of 109.3 million US households in 2003 and 111.9 million in 2008.**

*Source: Simmons Market Research Bureau, Fall 2003, and Winter 2007/08 Study of Media and Markets; compiled by Packaged Facts in The US Market for Pet Food: The New Value Equation, December 2008.*



#### New report available

Check out *The US Market for Pet Food: The New Value Equation* from Packaged Facts at [www.packagedfacts.com](http://www.packagedfacts.com).

## Diet and blood glucose

The effects of diets with different starch sources on glucose and insulin responses in cats were investigated. Six experimental diets consisting of 35% starch were extruded, each containing one of the following ingredients: cassava flour, brewer's rice, corn, sorghum, peas or lentils. The experiment was carried out on 36 cats with six replications per diet in a completely randomized block design. When compared to baseline values, only the corn diet stimulated an increase in the glucose response. The data suggests starch has less of an impact on cats' postprandial glucose and insulin responses than on those of dogs and humans. This can be explained by the metabolic peculiarities of felines.

**Source:** L.D. de-Oliveira, *et al.*, 2008. Effects of six carbohydrate sources on cat diet digestibility. *J. Anim Sci.*, doi: 10.2527/jas.2007-0354.

## Oats reduce cholesterol

Hypercholesterolemia occurs in various diseases in dogs, such as chronic kidney disease, hypothyroidism, diabetes mellitus and cholestasis. This study investigated whether dietary oats reduce serum cholesterol in dogs. Forty-eight healthy adult Beagles were fed a basal dry dog food for four weeks, then randomly divided into four groups with 12 dogs per group. Each group was given either the basal food or basal food with 5%, 10% or 20% of oat groats for eight additional weeks. Serum total cholesterol was measured in weeks zero and eight. Serum total cholesterol change was 1%, 2.1%, -5.6%, and -14.7% after eating the food containing 0%, 5%, 10% or 20% of oat groats for eight weeks, respectively—a significant difference for the 20% oat groats ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Source:** S. Yu, 2008. Oats reduce serum total cholesterol in healthy adult dogs. *FASEB J.* 22:11171.

## Key Concepts

### ► Diet and blood glucose

(*J. Anim Sci.*, doi: 10.2527/jas.2007-0354) The data suggests starch has less of an impact on cats' postprandial glucose and insulin responses than on those of dogs and humans.

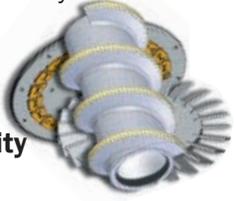
### ► Oats reduce canine cholesterol

(*FASEB J.* 22:11171) Dietary oats at 20% may be beneficial to dogs with hypercholesterolemia.



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# Product News

## Drive head replacement, repair

Rotex Global now is offering a replacement and repair program for screener drive heads with a two-year warranty for reconditioned drives. The company uses only original factory-quality components for the three service options: exchange, reconditioning and new drive service. Rotex also provides immediate shipment of a stock head drive in emergency situations. Upon reconditioning of an old drive head, the customer receives a credit for the salvage value of the returned drive.



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## Sanitary bulk bag filler

A new bulk bag filler from Flexicon, Swing-Down, features all-stainless construction and a pivot-down fill head designed to enable the operator to connect empty bags at floor level. According to the company, the filler simultaneously lowers and pivots the fill head, stopping it in a vertical position, which places the bag inlet spout inflatable connection, inflator button and four bag loop latches within reach of an operator on the plant floor. The filler is intended for food applications requiring rapid, thorough wash down.



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## Flexible silos

Spiroflow Systems Inc. has a line of flexible silos designed to store bulk solids and ingredients. Spirostore flexible silos are made of polyester fabric supported on a steel frame. According to the company, the silos can store up to 7,000 cubed feet of dry, bulk material, up to 90,000 pounds. The silos are made to customer specification and can be connected to any Spiroflow flexible screw, aero mechanical, pneumatic or vacuum conveyor system to fill and empty the stored material.



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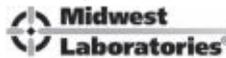
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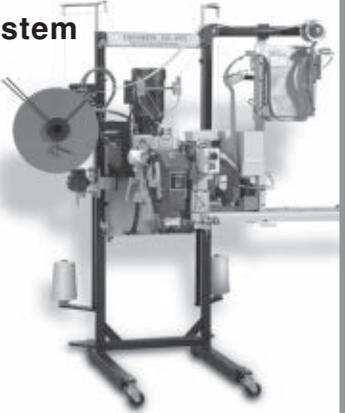
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# What pet retailers want from you

“**F**eed the pet and you’ll win.” That’s one of the key lessons Roman Versch, owner of the Pet Depot chain of pet stores (based in La Verne, California, USA), imparts to new franchisees. For his business, in which sales of dog and cat food average 30% of a store’s revenues, he knows pet foods build the foundation for success.

Even in tough economic times such as the current environment, everyone—including pets—still needs to eat. Except for the lowest-income pet owners, who may be forced to relinquish their pets, most owners will make sacrifices with other purchases or, at worst, trade down to a lower-priced petfood brand.

So, for pet retailers, petfood-buying consumers provide the regular traffic and sales stores need to stay profitable. Where do petfood manufacturers and marketers come in?

## Price points and value

Dave Ratner, owner of Dave’s Soda & Pet City in Agawam, Massachusetts, USA, said he would like to see more petfoods at lower price points. “We all love the high-end price point customer, but that’s not the bulk of the market.”

Ratner made his request during a roundtable discussion, “Pet retailers speak,” at Petfood Forum 2008 this past April in Chicago. He was joined on the panel by Mike Goldsmith of Mike’s Feed

**Petfood-buying consumers provide the regular traffic stores need to stay profitable.**

— Debbie Phillips-Donaldson



Farm in Paterson, New Jersey, USA, who echoed Ratner’s plea. “I lose sleep over incomes stagnating,” Goldsmith said. “Will this eventually affect the industry, especially the high-end segment?”

Versch, also a member of the panel, said he could use help from manufacturers in communicating the value of their brands. As an example, he mentioned a petfood line that includes stickers on its packaging declaring that the food costs just \$1.88 a day. “We could better communicate that petfood really doesn’t cost that much,” he said.

## Training tools needed

In a follow-up meeting, Versch emphasized the need of all pet retailers for education and training tools for their employees. He said salespeople from some petfood manufacturers provide information to store employees, but it’s often biased and inadequate.

Ratner said he encourages manufacturers’ reps to come into his store with information, but it has to be nutrition-based, not brand-based, and it can’t disparage other brands.

Versch suggested manufacturers provide brief, interactive training tools or videos on their sites or collaborate with other manufacturers to offer online pet nutrition and petfood information. An-

other suggestion was to possibly partner with an existing training program, such as Pet Store Pro, created by the US Pet Industry Distributor Association.

## Petco wish list

Even the big pet retailers want more from petfood companies. During a conference earlier this fall, Rick Rockhill, VP of dog food consumables for Petco, gave his wish list and suggestions:

- ▶ Use high-quality ingredients and formulas—and describe them with an ingredient deck consumers can read and pronounce.
- ▶ Invest in R&D to offer truly innovative products.
- ▶ Implement the highest levels of safety standards and testing—and clearly communicate your protocols.
- ▶ Offer meaningful line extensions—for example, ingredients with health benefits consumers can understand.
- ▶ Commit to grow the pet specialty channel (independent stores, too).
- ▶ Adopt sustainable practices and packaging. ●

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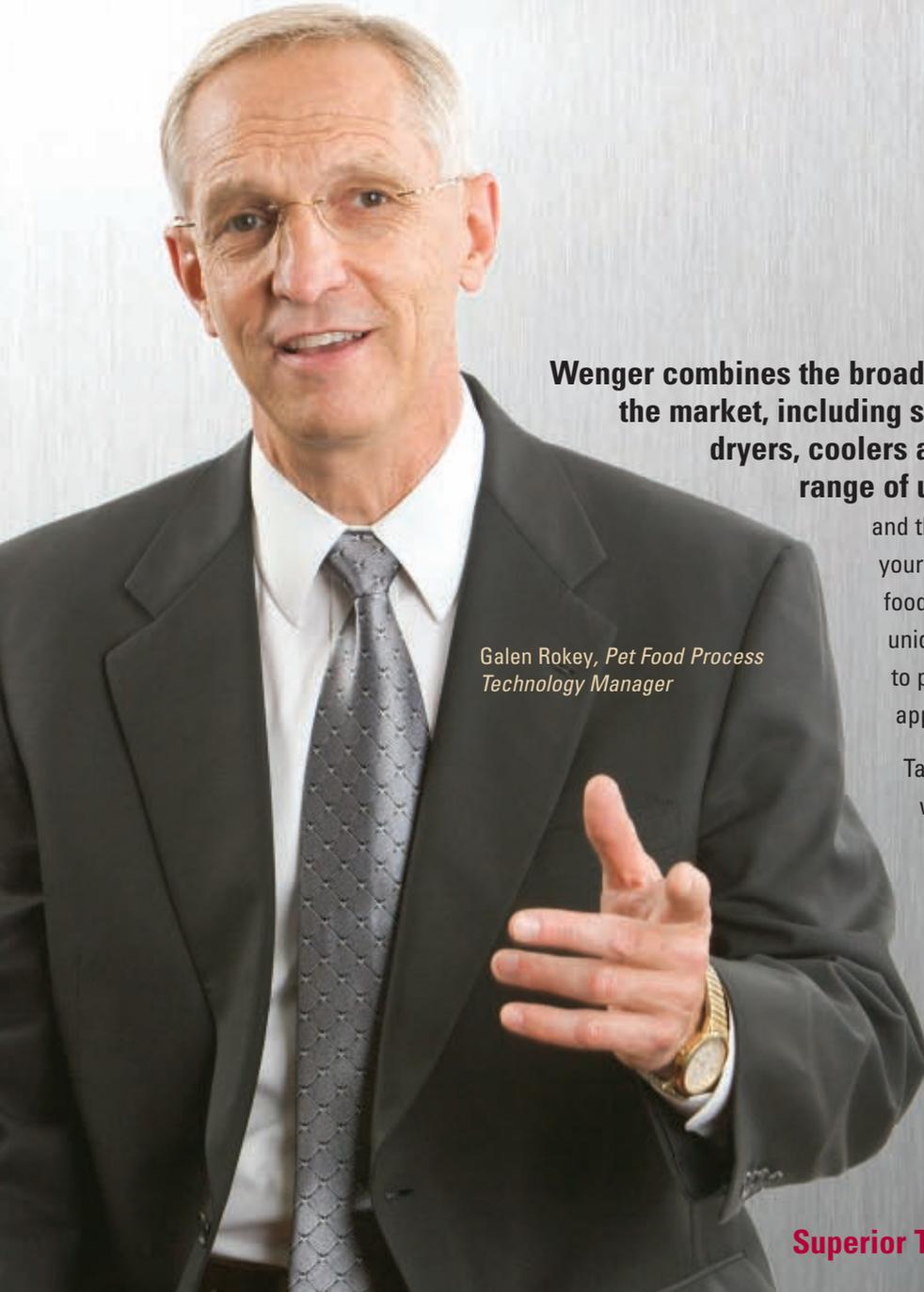
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