

The safety of pet food

Pet food companies' mission and duty vis-à-vis pets and their owners is to provide safe, nutritious and balanced food. Pet food safety, be it wet, dry or fresh products, is the first essential to be observed.

Ingredients



Many of the ingredients used in pet food come from parts of the animal or plant that are not consumed by humans (lungs, hearts, kidneys, etc.)

or produced during the processing of human food. Hygienic collecting, transport and maintaining the cold chain are securing the safety of pet food ingredients.

Production facilities

Pet food and treat manufacturing facilities are designed with safety in mind, to prevent product contamination and maximise security. Facility design may include use of stainless steel manufacturing equipment, installation of handwashing stations, established walking patterns to minimise contamination, protective coatings on floors and walls, and security of facility perimeter, internal area, equipment and ingredients.

Wet pet food

Wet pet food generally uses fresh meaty and vegetable ingredients filled in cans, trays or pouches, so-called hermetically sealed, airtight packaging. After filling and sealing, the products undergo a sterilisation process under high temperatures – identical to the canning process in human food. The wet pet food is thereby commercially sterile, meaning that no live bacteria are present – the products have a long shelf life and no preservatives need to be added during processing.

Dry pet food



Dry pet food generally uses dehydrated meaty and vegetable ingredients produced using high temperatures – these raw materials are therefore already safe; the mix of dry and some fresh pet food ingredients are then processed e.g. pressed, baked or extruded (extrusion is a human food processing type by which mixed ingredients are pressed under high pressure and heated through an opening which form the product). This process leads to stable products.

However, dry pet food not being packed in airtight containers exposure to oxygen and moisture could lead to fat getting rancid, to molds or to bacterial growth. Pet food manufacturers use natural or artificial antioxidants, sorbates or sulphites, also used in human food, to maintain products shelf stable.

Raw pet food

In addition to wet and dry pet food, there is a range of commercially produced raw pet food products available in frozen or freeze-dried formats. Raw pet food products can be complete or complementary. Complete diets will also contain additional ingredients such as fruit, vegetable and sometimes herbs to make them complete and balanced. Raw foods have a natural moisture content of approximately 65%. In terms of preparation, meat and edible bone are minced, mixed and then frozen to very low temperatures. Good hygiene practice is always important when handling your pet's food and even more so when handling raw products.

Pet owners to apply instructions of use



Pet food manufacturers mention instructions of use on the pet food label, including storage and handling requirements - these are common sense rules, like keeping products refrigerated (wet

pet food after opening and fresh pet food) or in cool, dry place (dry pet food). Pet owners should also review the packaging for product expiry date information.