

Buyers, Take Note - More Crucial Now With This Hotbed Issue

Even more so with this than other issues, you need to know how you're being taken advantage of and deceived. They claim it's for the good of your pet, but I encourage you to look at these facts before you believe one crafty word they say.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The pet food industry has taken notice of a new documentary called "Pet Fooled"
- "Pet Fooled" is an in-depth look at several aspects of the commercial pet food industry, including its lack of regulation and deceptive marketing practices
- One Pet Food Industry blogger attempts to defend the industry against allegations of deceptive marketing practices
- The blogger seems to blame the public — not the pet food industry — for consumers' lack of education and confusion about dog and cat diets

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published July 19, 2017.

As many of you are aware, I recently sat down for an interview with one of the producers of "Pet Fooled," a documentary about the pet food industry that I was honored to be a part of, along with several other pet nutrition experts, including my friends and colleagues Susan Thixton of TruthAboutPetFood.com, and Dr. Barbara Royal.

Pet Fooled filmmaker Kohl Harrington "... takes viewers on an entertaining and eye-opening journey exploring all facets of a harrowing and secretive industry, which has operated largely unchallenged until now," says Amazon.com.¹

The film is an in-depth look at the commercial pet food industry (the majority of which is owned by a handful of multi-conglomerate companies), its lack of regulation and how it has evolved over the years. The film also explores the actual dietary requirements of dogs and cats versus what pet food companies claim and what they sell.

"It's something few of us have taken the time to think about, and it's eye-opening when you realize how long they've operated without ever being challenged," says Harrington.² Here's the trailer for the film:

Big Pet Food Weighs in on Pet Fooled

Recently a writer for a pet food industry journal penned a blog post about "Pet Fooled" saying that after watching the film, she was surprised to realize she actually agreed with one of its main points, which is, "That consumers are under-educated and overly confused about their options."³

She goes on to say that, "What the documentary failed to address is that the pet food industry knows this and has been discussing the issue at great length for some time now." The pet food industry may be "discussing the issue at great length," but to what end? To see how it can further muddy the waters? Let's keep it real, pet food companies, shall we?

Your processed pet food "innovations" and crafty marketing campaigns are the No. 1 reason most dog and cat owners don't know which end is up when it comes to nourishing their pets. I'll also throw some shade at veterinarians who've been "educated" about pet nutrition by guess who? Yep. Big pet food companies.

Given all the controversy surrounding processed pet food in recent years, I would hope by now most vets have figured out they didn't get adequate training in animal nutrition in vet school, and take it upon themselves to study up on the subject so they can be better informed advocates for their animal patients. In my opinion, shilling for processed pet food companies is bad medicine.

The Pet Food Industry Deliberately Toys With Your Emotions

The PetfoodIndustry.com blogger concedes there's some merit to the film's premise that pet food marketing is "uniquely designed to pull at customer heartstrings and obfuscate the truth of what's in formulations." She goes on to state:

"... [T]here's a lot of relative-sounding language on pet food packaging: phrases like 'real meat,' 'all natural' and 'ancestral.' But what is 'real' and what is 'natural,' and what pet food purchaser actually knows the definition of an 'ancestral' diet? I've been to enough conventions and tradeshowes ... to know that the industry is constantly discussing and refining these definitions, in an effort to best serve itself and its customers ... both human and non-human."

The placement of "serve itself" first in this quote is probably unintentional, but it's dead-on accurate. Indeed, the pet food industry is always interested in how to best serve itself, first. Serving the best interests of the animals it feeds is an afterthought.

Another Serving of Word Salad With a Side of Tortured Logic

The blogger goes on to try to make the case that Big Pet Food isn't so much DECEPTIVE as it is ADAPTIVE. Here's her argument:

"The pet food industry is not out to fool consumers. Pet owners see 'real' and 'natural' on their own food products and decide that their pets need the same types of options. The industry takes those consumer decisions into account, and so you have pet food packaging that looks more and more like what you see on your own grocery store shelves."

This is what we call tortured logic. Let's see if we can follow it. The human food industry engages in its own deceptive marketing practices, for example, calling processed food "real" or "natural." You, the consumer, make food-buying decisions based to some degree on deceptive marketing.

In turn, the pet food industry learns which deceptive marketing practices work for the human food industry, and then follows suit to sell you highly processed pet food by calling it "real" and "natural." The pet food industry isn't out to fool consumers? Baloney. The blogger continues:

"Deceptive? No. Adaptive? Yes. Confusing and overwhelming? It can be, especially since consumer desires are becoming so nuanced, and the industry is trying so hard to cater to all those desires while maintaining the uncompromising nutritional standards necessary to keep the true customers — pets — happy and healthy."

Translation: She's trying to say the poor, long-suffering pet food companies are just trying to keep up with and cater to "nuanced" consumer desires while continuing to meet "uncompromising" nutritional standards for pet food. More baloney.

Pet parents have become increasingly demanding as a direct result of the poor-quality products the pet food companies have been turning out since their inception. In response, big pet food companies have become ever more creative with ingredient "innovations" and more cunning in their marketing campaigns, all for the sake of their profit margins, not the health of the pets they feed.

There's nothing wrong with making a profit. There's plenty wrong with deceiving and confusing people to make a profit, which is exactly what's been allowed to occur in this industry for too long.

The Biggest Lie of All: Most Pet Food Is Actually Pet FEED

Susan Thixton, a well-known pet food safety advocate, has been battling these issues longer than anyone I know. Recently, she asked me and an animal-loving attorney to join her in Washington, D.C. to address the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about the significant transparency and labeling issues within the pet food industry.

Our goal was to tackle some of the major issues the FDA needs to address (and hasn't) regarding the pet food industry, including improperly used and enforced terms that fail to correctly identify ingredients as FOOD or FEED. (For a detailed explanation of food versus feed, see Susan's blog post "[**Is It Feed or Food?**](#)")

Animal-grade pet "feed" is of vastly different quality than human-grade pet "food." Human-grade food ingredients (destined for consumption by people or pets) must comply with stringent storage, handling, processing and transportation regulations set forth to keep our food chain safe. This is not the case for animal feed, which includes 99 percent of pet foods on the market today.

This is incredibly confusing and unfair to pet parents who currently have no way to accurately judge the quality of pet food ingredients by the label (not to mention AAFCO's corporately owned ingredient definitions that are impossible to navigate). Why must all other animal feeds abide by the "feed versus food" labeling requirements, but pet food is allowed to be mislabeled (and therefore erroneously assumed safe for consumption)?

The vast majority of pet food companies do not use human-grade ingredients but still label their products as pet "food," implying the companies have abided by U.S. federal food laws, which couldn't be further from the truth, as evidenced by the recent Evanger's recall where euthanasia drugs were found in pet food.

What we asked for from the FDA: If ingredients intended for animal consumption do not comply with federal food safety laws, by default they must be labeled as "feed," not "food." Enforcing these definitions would provide consumers with an easy way to identify the difference between human-grade and feed-grade/rendered products. Currently there is no easily discernable way to judge the quality of raw ingredients going into pet food. You can read Susan's detailed summary of our visit [here](#).

So What's a Pet Parent to Do?

There are few situations in which the old adage "let the buyer beware" is more appropriate than when deciding what food to offer furry family members. Between the weekly pet food recalls and an exploding population of pets with chronic digestive issues, allergies and other health problems, it's no wonder so many pet parents are exploring homemade diets, fresh food diets made by smaller pet food producers, raw diets and other alternatives to the dead, rendered, dubious, processed stuff.

My advice? If you haven't seen Pet Fooled yet, you can find it at [iTunes](#), Vimeo and [Amazon.com](#). Also search this website for more information on choosing the best diet for your pet. There are dozens of videos and articles here that can help you become very knowledgeable about pet nutrition so that you can make the best diet choices for your own dog or cat.

When it comes to changing the deceptive practices occurring in the pet food industry itself, I recommend becoming a member of the [Association for Truth in Pet Food](#), which is the only organization out there committed to holding the regulatory agencies and AAFCO accountable.

Sources and References

[PetfoodIndustry.com May 7, 2017](#)

¹ [Amazon.com](#)

² [iTunes](#)

³ [PetfoodIndustry.com, May 7, 2017](#)
