

# Don't Touch This 'Novel' Ingredient With a 10-Foot Pole

It's being marketed to pet food manufacturers (and ultimately you) as a pet 'superfood' because it's eco-friendly, sustainable and money-saving. But note that none of those claims say anything about your pet's health.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pet food ingredient suppliers use marketing ploys to sell their products to pet food producers, just as pet food producers use marketing ploys to sell to consumers
- One especially egregious example is the marketing of rice bran as a "functional superfood" for dogs, when in fact, it's not even a biologically appropriate food for dogs (or cats)
- Rice and all components of rice, including bran, is still a grain; canines are carnivores and have no biological requirement for grains
- Rice bran also has a high rancidity rate, and may be contaminated with arsenic and/or mycotoxins, both of which are cancer-causing agents

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As many of you are aware, I regularly scan pet food industry journals to keep an eye out for "innovations" in processed dog and cat food. Generally speaking, the industry's focus is on finding and exploiting inexpensive "novel" ingredients that are *not* species-appropriate for dogs and cats.

## Rice Bran: A 'Superfood' for Dogs?

Recently, this headline caught my eye:

*"Rice bran becomes functional, sustainable dog superfood. A wasted resource could become a money-saving, eco-friendly dog food ingredient."<sup>1</sup>*

Note the catchwords in the headline:

- Functional
- Sustainable
- Superfood
- Money-saving
- Eco-friendly

These are the same marketing buzzwords pet food companies use to attract you, a potential customer, to their products. In this case, a company called RiceBran Technologies (a supplier of rice bran) is using marketing spin to attract its customers, pet food producers.

Obviously, foods that actually have all the attributes listed above are wonderful. However, when it comes to this particular ingredient, it's a situation of "good words gone bad."

Rice bran is about as far removed from a superfood for dogs (or cats) as it gets, so its remaining advertised advantages are irrelevant and potentially misleading. I encourage you to keep marketing tactics and buzzwords in mind when you're shopping for pet food.

Unfortunately, use of the words "sustainable" and "eco-friendly" to describe pet food usually means someone has discovered yet another way to incorporate waste from the human food industry into processed dog or cat food.

## 4 Reasons to Avoid Dog Food Containing Rice Bran

Rice bran is the fibrous outer portion of rice grain, and is a byproduct of the milling process that converts brown rice to white rice. It has a number of significant drawbacks as a pet food ingredient.

1. **It's a biologically inappropriate food for dogs** — Rice bran and all rice products are grains. Dogs, as we know, have no biological requirement for grain. The only grain wild canines get in their natural diet comes predigested in the stomach contents of prey animals.

Dogs in the wild hunt, kill and eat prey animals. They don't graze on grass or other grains like cows and horses do. They aren't herbivores or omnivores. Dogs are facultative carnivores, of the order Carnivora — evolutionarily, meat eaters.

Most grain-based pet foods contain loads of it because grain is plentiful and cheap. Grain-based pet foods are pro-inflammatory and generally detrimental to the health of dogs because as carnivores, they aren't designed to process food containing grain.

2. **Untreated rice bran has a high rancidity rate** — Rice bran contains a high amount of fat, which means it can go bad in a hurry during storage. Due to its high rancidity rate, this byproduct used to be thrown in the garbage by the rice processing industry, but then someone discovered it could be stabilized.

Stabilization involves treating the rice bran with sufficient heat and pressure to inactivate the lipase enzyme. There has been at least one recent recall of dog food due to a strong off odor that was traced to rancid rice bran.<sup>2</sup>

3. **Rice and rice products have been shown to contain high levels of arsenic** — A few years ago, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a consumer warning about arsenic in rice and rice products.<sup>3</sup> Arsenic is a toxic chemical that occurs naturally in the environment, including in soil and ground water. It also contaminates certain plants at high levels as a result of human agricultural activity. According to Dog Food Advisor:

*"... [U]ntil the 1980s, arsenic-based pesticides were commonly used by cotton farmers to help control boll weevils and other insects. However, since then, many of these same cotton fields have been flooded with water to grow rice.*

*So, some of the arsenic found in the soil is steadily absorbed by the growing rice plants.*"<sup>4</sup>

Consumer Reports conducted testing on rice and discovered higher levels of arsenic in brown rice than white rice, because the toxin accumulates in the outer layer of the rice grain.

According to the report, "Arsenic concentrations found in the bran that is removed during the milling process to produce white rice can be 10 to 20 times higher than levels found in bulk rice grain."<sup>5</sup>

4. **Rice bran may be contaminated with aflatoxins** — Aflatoxins are naturally-occurring mycotoxins produced by the *Aspergillus flavus* and *Aspergillus paraciticus* species of fungi that grow on certain crops. Aflatoxins are highly carcinogenic. They poison the liver and promote tumor development.

According to research from the University of Guelph in Canada, pet foods with plant-derived proteins may contain more harmful toxins than pet foods with meat proteins.

"A shift in pet food ingredients is on," says animal and poultry science professor, Trevor Smith, Ph.D., who has spent 35 years researching mycotoxins at Guelph.

"Instead of worrying about bacteria spoilage or disease contamination, like we have in the past, we now have to focus on removing mycotoxins."<sup>6</sup> Smith advises pet parents to minimize the risk of mycotoxins by avoiding inexpensive pet foods that contain vegetable cereals and corn or wheat fillers, and specifically, those with large amounts of rice bran.

*"That's the ingredient that's often contaminated," he says. "Although we have no exact numbers, we can estimate that when half of the food is of vegetable origin, there will almost always be some degree of contamination. If the food is mainly of animal origins, the chances of contamination are greatly reduced."*

## Stay Alert for Questionable Dog Food Ingredients and Marketing Practices

I hope I've given you not only another reason to avoid grain-based processed pet food, but also some additional insight into the ways marketers use trending words, phrases and concepts to position products or ingredients to appear to be something they're not.

In the case of rice bran, while it may be sustainable, money-saving and eco-friendly, those features have nothing to do with its appropriateness as a nutrient in dog food. The notion that rice bran is a functional superfood for dogs is absurd. If like so many pet parents you have questions about what food to offer your own dog, check out my **updated best-to-worst pet food rankings**:

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### Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [PetfoodIndustry.com, September 19, 2016](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Dog Food Advisor, December 1, 2015](#)

<sup>3</sup> [FDA.gov](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Dog Food Advisor, September 27, 2023](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Consumer Reports, November 2012](#)

<sup>6</sup> [PetfoodIndustry.com, August 23, 2013](#)