

New Product Developments in Pet Food and Snacks

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A look at some of the most interesting product launches in pet food and snacks during the past 12 months focuses on alternative and artisanal pet treats, a raw pet food that addresses safety concerns and a range of premium private label products in the UK.

Alternative pet treats find favour with health-conscious owners

Alternative pet food has come increasingly to the fore in recent years, particularly in the US in wake of the 2007 pet food recall, and this trend is now increasingly impacting pet treats. To take just one example, Oceanside, Californian-based DK Landon Inc launched a premium brand of dog cookies called Beggars Bakery Oven Baked Dog Cookies in June 2011. They are available in four flavours - Blueberry Apple, Cheesy Cheddar, Honey Cinnamon and Honey Peanut Butter (the most popular).

According to the company, what distinguishes this product range from other dog treats is its ingredients. The oven-baked treats are hypoallergenic and completely free from wheat, corn, soy and gluten. In addition, the company uses all-natural, human-grade ingredients from domestic sources. With the controversy regarding the safety of pet snacks and treats imported into the US from China snowballing during early 2012, domestically produced super-premium products are likely to be well received by affluent American consumers. Moreover, retail value sales of dog treats in North America expanded by 3% in real terms, to US\$2.474 billion, in 2011, according to Euromonitor International data.

Artisanal pet treats increasingly popular in emerging markets...

2011 also saw consumer demand for artisanal pet snacks and treats continue to rise, with a growing number of affluent owners in emerging markets buying treats from specialist pet bakeries. There are even a small but growing number of specialist pet bakeries in India.

In Mumbai, Kat Ferrara's Waggy Bags Gourmet Dog Bakery serves up such canine delights as pupcakes, bow wow biscottis, mini muttleys and chicken cakes on order and even caters for doggie birthday parties. Meanwhile, on the outskirts of the Chinese capital of Beijing, the Paopao Pet Bakery, which opened in March 2011, is believed to be the first of its kind in the country. According to owner Song Yu, its sweet potato, carrot and pumpkin bakes are selling very well.

...as food trucks gain traction in the US

Meanwhile, in another illustration of the growing importance of the artisanal trend, pet food trucks are growing in popularity in the upmarket neighbourhoods of North American cities. In May 2011, a new food truck for dogs called Fido To Go (FTG) hit the streets of Chicago, selling ice cream and baked treats for dogs. In Atlanta, Poochicles has been serving doggie ice cream and all-natural, organic, corn-free, soy-free and dairy-free baked goods since June 2011.

In the UK private label goes upmarket

Private label products accounted for 15.5% of retail value sales of dog and cat food in the UK in 2011, according to Euromonitor International data, but just a 0.3% retail value share of the premium segment. With premium products significantly outperforming the market as a whole (with real compound annual growth rates of 3.3% and 0.9%, respectively, over the 2006-2011 period), retailers are increasingly targeting the premium pet food segment. During autumn 2011, Asda launched what is thought to be the first private label pet food range in the UK with no artificial colours or preservatives. The Hero range of dog and cat food and treats includes both resealable pouches and more traditional metal cans, and the range of dog food products is segmented by both age and size. While some purchasers of premium pet food may be resistant to private label, the fact that many UK shoppers already happily put gourmet and organic private label packaged food into their shopping trolleys bodes well for this type of product.

Non-extruded bird food preserves nutrients

In the UK, Animalzone launched what it claimed was a unique non-extruded parrot food during early 2011. According to Marketing Director Richard Davies, "Shortly after the roasting process, while still hot, we shape the grain. It either gets rolled, ground or remains in its natural shape. Compared to extrusion this process is not aggressive and it also has the advantage of preserving the natural characteristics of the grain with added nutritional value". He adds that "the second process of shaping the pellets is done at a low temperature, which allows us to add a variety of products. We use a variety of natural plant extracts that results in a food that supports health and wellbeing and also promotes superb plumage".

Making raw pet food safer

Raw pet food has become increasingly popular of late but its safety has been questioned by some veterinarians. Interviewed in the New York Times during February 2011, Dr Ann Hohenhaus, a spokeswoman for the Animal Medical Center in New York City, said: "There are too many risks associated with it". She said that these include sanitary issues (the food carries microbes that could harm either the pet or humans in the household) and the possibility that the diet is not nutritionally balanced. "Dogs have been domesticated and living with us for, some of

them, centuries. A raw food diet is not necessarily going to agree with these animals that we've imposed our lifestyles on," she added.

Canadian company NRG Pet Products is attempting to address some of these concerns. It claims to have "come up with the most convenient way to feed your dog a raw diet". It says that its Maxim dehydrated dog food "is a breakthrough in the raw dog food feeding arena". According to the company, "Why feed messy inconvenient raw diets that require diligent food safety practices when you can simply add water to create the ultimate balanced, fresh, raw grainless ration for your dog".

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