

# THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS AND DOGS

by Ann Martin

**T**he pet food industry, a billion-dollar, unregulated operation, feeds on the garbage that otherwise would wind up in landfills or be transformed into fertiliser. The hidden ingredients in a can of commercial pet food may include roadkill and the rendered remains of cats and dogs. The pet food industry claims that its products constitute a "complete and balanced diet" but, in reality, commercial pet food is unfit for human or animal consumption. "Vegetable protein", the mainstay of dry dog foods, includes ground yellow corn, wheat shorts and middlings, soybean meal, rice husks, peanut meal and peanut shells (identified as "cellulose" on pet food labels). These often are little more than the sweepings from milling room floors. Stripped of their oil, germ and bran, these "proteins" are deficient in essential fatty acids, fat-soluble vitamins and antioxidants. "Animal protein" in commercial pet foods can include diseased meat, roadkill, contaminated material from slaughterhouses, faecal matter, rendered cats and dogs and poultry feathers. The major source of animal protein comes from dead-stock removal operations that supply so-called "4-D" animals—dead, diseased, dying or disabled—to "receiving plants" for hide, fat and meat removal. The meat (after being doused with charcoal and marked "unfit for human consumption") may then be sold for pet food.

Rendering plants process decomposing animal carcasses, large roadkill and euthanised dogs and cats into a dry protein product that is sold to the pet food industry. One small plant in Quebec, Ontario, renders 10 tons (22,000 pounds) of dogs and cats per week. The Quebec Ministry of Agriculture states that "the fur is not removed from dogs and cats" and that "dead animals are cooked together with viscera, bones and fat at 115° C (235° F) for 20 minutes".

The US Food and Drug Administration's Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) is aware of the use of rendered dogs and cats in pet foods, but has stated: "CVM has not acted to specifically prohibit the rendering of pets. However, that is not to say that the practise of using this material in pet food is condoned by the CVM." In both the US and Canada, the pet food industry is virtually self-regulated. In the US, the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) sets guidelines and definitions for animal feed, including pet foods. In Canada, the most prominent control is the "Labeling Act", simply requiring product labels to state the name and address of the manufacturer, the weight of the product and whether it is dog or cat food. The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) and the Pet Food Association of Canada (PFAC) are voluntary organisations that, for the most part, rely on the integrity of the companies they certify to assure that product ingredients do not fall below minimum standards.

The majority—85 to 90 per cent—of the pet food sold in Canada is manufactured by US-based multinationals. Under the terms of the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement, neither the CVMA nor PFAC exercises any control over the ingredients in cans of US pet food.

Pet food industry advertising promotes the idea that, to keep pets healthy, one must feed them commercially formulated pet foods. But such a diet contributes to cancer, skin problems, allergies, hypertension, kidney and liver failure, heart disease and dental problems. One more item should be added to pet food labels: a skull-and-crossbones insignia!

*(Ann Martin is an animal rights activist and leading critic of the commercial pet food industry. She lives in London, Ontario, Canada.)*

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# A LOOK INSIDE A RENDERING PLANT

by Gar Smith

Rendering has been called "the silent industry". Each year in the US, 286 rendering plants quietly dispose of more than 12.5 million tons of dead animals, fat and meat wastes. As the public relations watchdog newsletter PR Watch observes, renderers "are thankful that most people remain blissfully unaware of their existence".

When *City Paper* reporter Van Smith visited Baltimore's Valley Proteins rendering plant last summer, he found that the "hoggers" (the large vats used to grind and filter animal tissues prior to deep-fat-frying) held an eclectic mix of body parts ranging from "dead dogs, cats, raccoons, possums, deer, foxes [and] snakes" to a "baby circus elephant" and the remains of Bozeman, a Police Department quarterhorse that "died in the line of duty".

In an average month, Baltimore's pound hands over 1,824 dead animals to Valley Proteins. Last year, the plant transformed 150 millions pounds of decaying flesh and kitchen grease into 80 million pounds of commercial meat and bone meal, tallow and yellow grease. Thirty years ago, most of the renderer's wastes came from small markets and slaughterhouses. Today, thanks to the proliferation of fast-food restaurants, nearly half the raw material is kitchen grease and frying oil.

Recycling dead pets and wildlife into animal food is "a very small part of the business that we don't like to advertise," Valley Proteins' President, J. J. Smith, told *City Paper*. The plant processes these animals as a "public service, not for profit," Smith said, since "there is not a lot of protein and fat [on pets]..., just a lot of hair you have to deal with somehow."

According to *City Paper*, Valley Proteins "sells inedible animal parts and rendered material to Alpo, Heinz and Ralston-Purina". Valley Proteins insists that it does not sell "dead pet by-products" to pet food firms since "they are all very sensitive to the recycled pet potential". Valley Proteins maintains two production lines—one for clean meat and bones and a second line for dead pets and wildlife. However, Van Smith reported, "the protein material is a mix from both production lines. Thus the meat and bone meal made at the plant includes materials from pets and wildlife, and about five per cent of that product goes to dry-pet-food manufacturers..."

A 1991 USDA report states that "approximately 7.9 billion pounds of meat and bone meal, blood meal and feather meal [were] produced in 1983". Of that amount, 34 per cent was used in pet food, 34 per cent in poultry feed, 20 per cent in pig food and 10 per cent in beef and dairy cattle feed.

Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) carried in pig- and chicken-laden foods may eventually eclipse the threat of "mad cow disease". The risk of household pet exposure to TSE from contaminated pet food is more than three times greater than the risk for hamburger-eating humans.

*(Gar Smith is Editor of Earth Island Journal.)*

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