

Perfecting premium pet treats

Industrial dehydration offers processors a safe solution for producing healthy choices on the pet food aisle.



For many consumers, pets are much more than companions; they are bona fide family members.

Pet owners are now called “pet parents”, and like any parent the health and welfare of family members is a high priority.

Pet food manufacturers are addressing the trend of humanizing pets and treating them as family members, and they have responded to consumer demand for cleaner labels and natural ingredients in dehydrated pet foods and treats. Sweet potatoes, quinoa, apples, chia seeds and other ingredients bearing a “healthy halo” have joined meat and poultry as ingredients in dehydrated pet treats such as chews, strips and chips. Most retailers’ pet food aisles include refrigerated cases to merchandise high-end, perishable foods and treats, some packaged in chubs and others featuring



INDUSTRIAL DEHYDRATORS FROM MARLEN

KEY BENEFITS:

- Increased air velocity over the surface of the product, resulting in **more uniform process conditions**, day after day
- Innovative design keeps air in the “processing” zone for **better performance**
- Rapid moisture removal promotes **faster drying cycles**

PET FOOD TRENDS

MIRROR TODAY'S HUMAN FOOD
AND DIET TRENDS.



re-sealable pouches. Today's pet owners think nothing of sharing their refrigerator and cupboard space with their canine and feline extended family.

Spending without paws

“Both food and veterinary care are strongly influenced by consumers’ growing interest in improved healthcare for their pets,” said Bob Vetere, president and CEO of the American Pet Products Association (APPA). “Health and wellness-related themes represent the most powerful trends across all segments of the industry and will continue to do so again this year.”

The pet food segment remains the highest spending segment of the pet industry as pet food trends continue to mirror human food and diet trends, according to APPA. In 2013, consumers spent \$21.57 billion on pet food, a 4.5 percent increase over 2012. The APPA is forecasting 4.9 percent growth in the pet food segment for 2014, which is an estimated \$22.62 billion.



Hot-button healthcare issues such as obesity and obesity-related illnesses influence better-for-you trends in human foods and beverages. These same issues also are driving ingredient trends for dehydrated pet foods and treats — obesity is considered an epidemic among dogs and cats. The American Humane Society notes that 56 percent of dogs and 54 percent of cats were considered overweight or obese in 2011. Additionally, a recent survey of 800 Banfield hospitals revealed a 32 percent increase in diabetes in dogs and a 16 percent increase in diabetes in cats since 2006.

Lapping up opportunities

As a result, consumer demand for better-for-your-pet products continues to drive product innovations. In March, Superior Farms Pet Provisions, Dixon, Calif., launched a new beef chew for pets at the Global Pet Expo in Orlando, Fla. Superior Farms Pet Provisions produces natural lamb and venison pet treats and chews at facilities in the United States and New Zealand.

"Adding beef items was an obvious fit to our popular lamb and venison pet treats and chews," said Gary Pfeiffer, president of the company. "Customers really asked us to do this. They appreciate that we provide verified sourcing and control everything in the process from procurement, drying, packaging and distribution."

Springdale, Ark.-based Tyson Foods, Inc. produces pet treats under the True Chews, Nudges and Top Chews brands at a plant in Independence, Iowa. The company's True Chews 100% Natural Dog Treats are available as Jerky Cuts tenders and bites. The treats are made with chicken and contain no artificial flavors or fillers. Tyson manufactures animal nutrition products for aquaculture, agriculture and household pets.

Ingredients for wet pet food include uncooked, fresh and frozen chicken products.

Cargill offers an array of animal nutrition products including poultry and rabbit feeds, deer, elk and game bird feed, and pet food.

In February, Cargill announced plans to acquire Sanger, Calif.-based Pet Carousel, a manufacturer of private label dog treats and toys including Roper brand cotton blend chew ropes, Choo Hooves natural bones and chews and a line of natural white meat chicken and jerky, and sweet potato and vegetable chews. At the time, the company described Pet Carousel as a complement to Cargill's California distribution and beef processing business. "From Cargill's perspective, Pet Carousel has a lot to offer in the way of synergies with our existing animal protein and distribution businesses," said John Niemann, president of Wichita-based Cargill Food Distribution.

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EVERY MARLEN INDUSTRIAL DEHYDRATOR

is equipped with process verification control systems that provide HACCP documentation/reporting for complete process lethality. Systems with 'smart' capabilities present themselves as a safer choice for the production of natural and organic pet treats

Safety focused

Pet food is made using many of the same processes used to make human food, according to the Pet Food Institute (PFI). Some pet foods and treats are extruded like breakfast cereals or snack foods. Manufacturers of canned pet food follow the same federal low-acid processing requirements as food for people. Other pet food products such as biscuits are baked using similar equipment and techniques used to make human food products. However, there are no preventative controls for establishments that make pet food. Last fall, the Food and Drug Administration moved to change that and bring hazard analysis to pet food manufacturing plants. Call it a Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) for pets.

FDA published a proposed rule for animal food preventative controls. The Preventive Controls for Food for Animals addresses the manufacturing, processing, packing and holding of animal food. The rule would establish good manufacturing practices for buildings, facilities and personnel that would include cleaning, maintenance, pest control and personal hygiene of workers. The rule comes as FDA investigates jerky treats that have sickened more than 3,600 cats and dogs since 2007. Clearly, the emphasis on food safety by food manufacturers transcends products for human consumption and includes treats and food for consumers' four-legged family members.

The proposed rule has kept PFI busy providing a voice for its members. Pat Tovey, director of technology and regulatory compliance for PFI, said the organization is working more closely with its members on regulatory issues such as the Preventive Controls for Food for Animals.

"Our members have had a huge amount of focus since last fall in preparing our response back to FDA letting them know where we think they hit the nail on the head, and where we think we could offer some suggestions for improving the rule," Tovey said.

With equipment in some of the biggest USDA-inspected meat and poultry plants in the country, Riverside, Mo.-based Marlen International utilizes the same engineering expertise and food-safety standards for the dehydration and thermal processing of pet foods and treats as it does for food products made for human consumption.



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