



Humanization of pets driving innovation in natural ingredients



Whether for human or pet food, increasing consumer demand for natural and healthy products is driving manufacturers to source higher-quality ingredients and innovate product lines.

[Collette Kakuk](#) | Mar 17, 2022

For many Americans, the humanization of pets has moved beyond trend and into the norm. Increasingly, pet owners see their furry friends as part of the family, and desire to provide their pets with human-like products, experiences and care. For example, SPINS [data](#) show that 50% of dog owners, and about a third of cat owners celebrate a pet's birthday with a treat, gift or party, while 40% of dog owners and 25% of cat owners bought clothing for their pet in 2020.

The American Pet Products Association (APPA) [reported](#) that consumers spent \$103.6 billion in 2020 on pets and \$42 billion of that was on pet food and treats. And the pet industry shows no signs of slowing down. Fior Markets [projected](#) steady growth, predicting the global pet care market will reach \$358.62 billion by 2027.



According to the [2021-2022 National Pet Owners Survey](#) conducted by APPA, pet ownership during the pandemic grew to an all-time high of 70% of U.S. households (about 90.5 million homes); 12% of adults with kids under 18 adopted pets during this time. Pets provided a welcome distraction at home for many experiencing increased stress and time spent on lockdown.

A 2020-2021 Statista survey [revealed](#) that Millennials represent the biggest share of U.S. pet owners, at 32%. This was followed by Baby Boomers with 27%, and Gen Xers representing 24% of pet owners.

As go pet parents...

As pet owners increasingly humanize and accept pets as family, pet owners not only want to keep pets fed, but also healthy and happy. Per SPINS, nearly 70% of Millennials want natural and organic products for their pets, and 73% of Gen Zers and 68% of Millennials are willing to spend more on sustainable pet products.

Further, in 2020, proprietary Mintel data identified “make it mine” as a key consumer trend, and highlighted that 61% of U.S. pet owners are willing to pay more for pet foods that help support specific dietary needs of their pets, including gut health, healthy weight and healthy aging. Pet owners spent more than ever in 2020 on products to keep pets comfortable, healthy, entertained and calm. Interestingly, we are seeing these same drivers reflected in the purchase decisions of consumers for their own needs.

Increasing consumer demand for natural and healthy ingredients is driving leading manufacturers to source higher quality materials and ingredients and to innovate product lines like never before. The pet food and treat industry is definitely stepping up to the challenge, offering an unprecedented variety of options for pet foods, treats and supplements. APPA noted over 40% of both dog and cat owners purchase “premium” pet food, and organic pet products saw 22% growth during 2021.

Today’s innovation is pushing into an increasing number of pet food and specially formulated treats that contain 100% natural, plant-based, ingredients, including specific attention to sustainability as well. Just as consumers want clean, simple and sustainable ingredient labels for their own products, the same is true for their pets.

An APPA pandemic insights study [showed](#) in 2020, 70% of pet owners claimed they spent much more time with pets during lockdown and social distancing, and 72% of pet owners agreed that spending time with their pet helps reduce stress and increase a sense of well-being—both for themselves, and for the pets.

This is a real win/win in a time when stress and mental health top the charts, and are affecting so many people (and pets) around the globe. Pets are known to help their humans with everything from mood and stress to exercise and security. As we bond with pets, the tendency is to humanize them.

Nutrition and condition-specific

Many pet parents are looking for the highest-quality, most nutritious food they can find for their pet, and are willing to use supplements and functional food and treats to help promote wellness. Several areas that consumers are concerned about for themselves are also key drivers in the pet space, including things like:

- Immune health
- Gut and digestive health
- Allergies
- Anxiety/stress
- Weight management



- Healthy inflammation
- Joint health

Increasingly, consumers are taking vitamins and supplements in efforts to improve nutrition, and some are changing their diets and routines to help ensure long-term health and overall wellness. Pet parents are also using pet supplements, functional treats and lifestyle changes to help give their pets all the support they can to help ensure a happy, healthy and comfortable life.

Packaged Facts recently highlighted [findings](#) from its survey of pet owners, noting that pet owners stated COVID-19 spurred greater concerns about pet health. Among both dog and cat owners:

- Over 40% are paying closer attention to pet health and wellness
- Nearly 25% are especially concerned about their pet’s anxiety and stress
- About 20% are especially concerned about their pet’s immune system
- About 15% have made changes to the pet health care products they buy

According to Mintel’s Global New Product Database, digestive health is among the fastest-growing claims within the pet food functional nutrition category. And SPINS [reported](#) 22% growth in 2021 for pet items containing CBD.

Metabolic oxidative processes influence most inflammatory conditions (Circ Res. 2018;122:877-902). Inflammation derives from the activation of specific pathways by external stimuli, or metabolic ROS (reactive oxygen species) buildup. Most pets and people can benefit from antioxidants to help keep oxidative stress in check.

Natural, Clean-Label

Some of the trending natural botanical ingredients used functionally or additively in pet foods, treats and supplements, include:

- Hemp and CBD
- Citrus flavonoids
- Pomegranate extract
- Green tea extract
- Rosemary extracts
- Sweet blackberry extract
- Rhodiola extract
- Ginkgo extract
- Epimedium
- Mango leaf extract
- Seaweed extract

The pet food and treat market is seeing a shift towards clean label and natural. Lipid oxidation in pet food and pets rejecting the food

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lean label and natural. Appeal to both the consumer and pet parent by using rosemary and green

tea.

Not a passing trend

Pet humanization is far from a passing fad. The connections between pets and their owners are only growing stronger, and brands are increasingly innovating as pet owners are looking for more humanized options for pets. These bonds and friendships are tight, and why wouldn't pet owners want many of the same health and wellbeing for their pets as they do for themselves and the rest of their families?

Similar, but not identical

Many of the health challenges humans are experiencing are distinctly reflected in pets as well. However, of course, humans and animals are not exactly the same, and there are some considerations in varying nutritional needs for pets and humans. Foods that are not properly balanced to meet a dog's needs can lead to health problems. For example, calcium and phosphorus must be balanced, and dogs need more taurine. And, while vitamin C is considered an essential vitamin for humans because the body requires it, but can't make it, for dogs it is not considered essential, because they actually form vitamin C in the liver.

It is important to work with animal nutrition experts in making formulation choices for pet foods, treats and supplements. Many safe, tested, natural, clean label, organic and sustainable options are available that can help "up-level" pet brands to meet the discerning and premium demands of pet owners today.

Collette Kakuk, VP of global marketing at [Layn Natural Ingredients](#), has three decades of experience in branding, customer experience, qualitative and quantitative market research, predictive modeling and competitive analysis—including food service, food processing, manufacturing, restaurant, banking and Fortune 100 business consulting. Her passion for people, animals and the planet helps fuel her interest in natural botanical ingredient marketing and innovation. Kakuk proudly served in the U.S. military and holds an MBA from the Ross School at the University of Michigan.

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