



Concerns about grain-free food

A recent FDA announcement alerted consumers and industry to dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) in dogs eating grain-free foods. Surely it was too early for this warning.

Caution required

The report of an ongoing investigation in the US received global media attention. Self-proclaimed 'experts' passed it on to millions of concerned consumers. Not wanting to add to the growing number of articles on the subject, I do want to suggest caution. There are great differences in the hundreds of grain-free foods produced: ingredients, processes and nutrient balances. To say they could all suddenly cause a nutritional health issue seems premature.

Grain-free foods have been on the market since the early 2000s (some 'non-grain' pet food even before that) and no such trend has been reported before now. Consumers like to buy pet food with similar ingredients to their own diet. If they avoid wheat because of coeliac disease, or gluten for other reasons, their pets should too. Is humanisation leading to nutritional issues?

Good science takes time

Higher incidence of DCM in some breeds is a known fact. Using pharmacological taurine levels has been helpful for treatment of DCM. But do nutritional taurine levels similar to those in cat food prevent or delay the treatment of DCM? And do certain ingredients, nutrient balances and processes increase the number of breeds affected or the speed of the onset of DCM?

No real answers exist.

The basis of good science is to propose a theory based on observation and review. Good scientists test and retest hypotheses for years until careful interpretations can be made. Whatever work we do, having strong opinions and overstating what the facts show can stimulate healthy debate, but the facts must be there. The FDA warning about grain-free foods is concerning as data is limited. Announcing an

investigation into DCM-related issues would have been enough, but the connection between DCM and grain-free foods is now becoming fact.

Consumers need facts

A year ago, I was approached by a consumer group convinced that all dog food is taurine-deficient. I pointed out that food I had created has taurine fortified – not to prevent DCM, but to be nutritionally prudent. The group was adamant that all dogs must receive mega doses of taurine. I suggested that a taurine supplement might be a precaution in breeds with genetic implications, but pharmacological doses of taurine in all dog food was costly and unproven science. The group intended to recruit more members and present their case to regulators. Perhaps they later approached the FDA. Did they stir things up on the internet before there were facts? It remains unclear.

We live in a world where guesses and assumptions can be presented as facts on the internet. One negative comment online soon multiplies into 'facts' and 'truth'. We need to be careful about drawing conclusions with a snapshot of data. We should not discard any food products based on theory. We must use precaution in the communication of scientific facts, because assumptions will be made and facts can be twisted. ♦



Dr. George Collings
gcollings@cnutritionalsolutions.com
cnutritionalsolutions.com