



DCM, Grain-Free & the USFDA Where Do We Go Now?

By now, all of us have read many articles and opinions after the USFDA's alerts on Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) which originated on July 12, 2018. Two updates followed in 2019.

How the social buzz started

The original alert came when a social media consumer group submitted numerous details of dogs with DCM to the FDA. This group openly suggested to me that they were convinced that DCM was taurine related and found in foods with peas. Their hypothesis was elevated when a University professor suggested 3-5 grams of taurine per day. Pharmacological doses have been helpful for years, which conjectures the addition of prudent nutritional levels in the food. DCM has long been reported as a genetic predisposition in certain breeds. To be clear, additional taurine would seem prudent, but the pharmacological levels approach 1.0% of the food.

The USFDA opened a portal to all consumers to submit DCM cases with the format 'How to Report a Complaint'. This curious consumer approach would

most certainly lead to many complaints as long as the social media group was active.

What is the standpoint of the USFDA?

In the first alert, the USFDA opined three major thoughts based upon their limited data: 1. A majority of dogs were 'eating certain foods containing peas, lentils, other legume seeds or potatoes' called grain-free; 2. The underlying cause of DCM is not known; and 3. Taurine deficiency is well-documented as potentially leading to DCM.' The long-standing belief that DCM had a genetic component was minimized even though epidemiological studies suggest 0.5% to 1.1% of dogs have DCM potential.

The 10 to 20-year-old grain-free product marketing niche was born with the advancing humanization of pet foods coupled with the demonization of corn, wheat and soybean. Market share of grain-free foods

DCM is a condition in which the heart becomes enlarged and cannot pump blood effectively. It often affects large breeds of dogs but it does occur in some smaller breeds as well.

has grown to over 25% to 40% of dogs and over 70% in some channels. Communication to veterinarians was limited clarifying the nutritional values. To be clear, the nutritional position was not based as superior, but 'familiar' to pet owners. In this positioning, the pet food industry was following FDA-approved ingredients, nutritional profiles and nutritional claims.

By the next update, the FDA recognized the genetic predisposition, but suggested there were many breeds reported not known to have this predisposition. By the second update, it became clear that the great majority of breeds reported were breeds that had known genetic predisposition and no hypothesis was made considering that genetic issues was escalating even with the well-known improper breeding of back-yard breeders. No comments were made that consumers are feeding 20% to 40% more calories on top of their balanced pet foods leading to imbalanced nutrition.

Where do we go now?

Let's remind ourselves that science first makes hypotheses, which are tested widely and refined. The USFDA repeated conjecture and reported no scientific data or direction ultimately naming over 40 products by name and immortalized sixteen brands in a table. The USFDA's reports have hurt the industry badly and have now added a long list of viable ingredients to the hall-of-shame list with corn, wheat and soybean. The viability of these alternate ingredients is fully demonized.

To quote my first boss, if you work long enough in this business, foods will be made from air and water. Hold on – those might be next! ♦



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