



## The Benefits Of Feeding Wet Food To Your Pets

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Leading with Technical Expertise - White Paper

*Leah Lambrakis & Jarrod Kersey, Department of Technical Services*

### The Choices Are Plentiful!

Pet food offerings available on retail, pet specialty and independent store shelves, in addition to what is available on ecommerce, are certainly plentiful. Innovative product options have exploded in the pet food industry, which at one time was largely dry kibble and canned wet food. As technologies have advanced and consumer demand has influenced the evolution of pet food concepts, pet parents have numerous options available to them; freeze-dried, raw, fresh prepared, and dehydrated to name a few. Of course, we then layer in the claims-race including organic, non-GMO, locally and ethically sourced, as well as sustainable practices and innovative packaging options. The selection available is broad, and no question overwhelming to the pet parent when choosing the right food for their companions. However, there is no single solution to feeding your pet, as it is our belief that this is a personal choice that reflects the pet parent's lifestyle, nutritional philosophies, and budget.

### Considerations & Benefits

For decades dry kibble has been the most common and primary food of choice by pet parents, followed by wet food. In an observational study of pet feeding practices by Dodd et al. (2020), of 3673 respondents, the daily feeding of conventional kibble was reported for 61% of dogs and 69% of cats, and the daily feeding of canned food was 15% for dogs and 44% of cats. Additional feeding regimes that have become increasingly popular, such as raw animal products, vegan/vegetarian, and home-made meals were also included in this study. The greater incidence of cat owners reporting that they feed canned food is not uncommon, as detailed by Schleicher et al. (2019) in a similar study identifying the determinants of pet food purchasing decisions.

Feeding dry kibble is an economical option that is complete and balanced, energy dense, convenient and easy to serve and store. Considering the addition of a wet offering in a daily or rotational meal offers diversity and flavor variety, complimentary nutrients, physiological benefits, plus the obvious – food enjoyment! Let's discuss these in more detail.

### Increased Moisture

One of the primary benefits of wet food is the dietary hydration delivered to the animal. Depending on the product design, ranging across pate, cuts in gravy, shreds, broths, purees or stew formats, the moisture content of wet food can range from 68-86% on an as fed basis. The added moisture is especially important for cats that are more prone to urinary disease, as cats tend to have a lower drive to freely drink



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water, likely due to their evolution as desert animals (Markwell et al., 1998). Further, higher moisture foods can benefit animals that require nutritional management of diabetes by controlling blood sugar levels, in addition to kidney disease, as the low moisture content of kibble could be taxing on these organs (Greene et al., 2014). It is important to note that not all wet diets are appropriate for diabetic animals, depending on the level of carbohydrates in the food.

### More Meat

By design, wet pet foods are high in total meat content, which cats and dogs especially love. Thereby wet food delivers an abundance of protein (thus a high level of amino acids), fat and other macro-nutrients. In addition, wet foods are typically lower in carbohydrates, starches and fibers. For the finicky strict carnivore, otherwise known as the cat, these food characteristics naturally provide the meat content they crave. While it can be a bit tricky to compare the guaranteed analysis of a dry food vs. wet food label, simply because wet foods contain much more moisture, the protein content of wet food is significantly higher. It is important to be mindful that some companion animals may not benefit from high protein diets due to illness or disease relating to kidney function. In the commercial manufacturing of wet pet food, the sources of meat, poultry and fish are typically deboned or ground parts and carcasses, in addition to a broad range of whole organ options. It is not as common to use meat meals in wet pet food, as formulators and manufacturers are able to optimize on fresh or frozen selections to maximize nutrition and processing.

### Less Additives And Preservatives

Wet pet foods that are packaged in cans, pouches, trays and tubs are primarily cooked through a retort sterilization system, and by design, when the product has reached commercial sterility the package itself preserves the food. Commercial sterilization is the inactivation of organisms, most specifically, *Clostridium botulinum* which is the most heat-resistant organism, by cooking the product at a validated temperature for a required amount of time (Kuntz, 1994, Kvamme and Phillips, 2003). Thereby manufacturers do not need to add preservatives to wet pet food formulations specifically for the purposes of shelf life stability and freshness. However, we most certainly can optimize the benefits of natural antioxidants in our ingredients and foods.

### Texture

The soft, moist and meaty texture of wet pet food formats are conducive to easier chewing for aging animals that may have dental considerations, smaller breed animals that naturally take smaller bites, and



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even teething puppies and kittens. These textures may be more accepting for finicky animals that find other forms of food less appealing relative to mouthfeel.

### Palatability & Digestibility

High meat, high moisture, textured and aromatic food offerings naturally drive high acceptability and palatability with companion animals. It is no surprise that the addition of wet food to a pet's food bowl is eagerly consumed with delight! Further, aging animals that may have lost their ability to smell effectively, may find wet foods more enticing during meal time. Even more important than palatability is the digestibility of a food. Digestibility is defined as the collective proportion of all nutrients in the food available for absorption from the intestine into the body (Case et al., 2011). Simply put, the measurement of digestibility assesses the nutritional value of a food. Wet pet food is typically quite high in digestibility due to the high meat content and lower fiber levels. Historical and more recent research conducted by Simmons Pet Food yielded high digestibility results for several wet pet foods, ranging in product design such as all meat, grain and alternative carbohydrate containing formulations. Dry matter, energy, crude protein and crude fat averaged 85-96% digestibility.

### Variety & Increased Food Enjoyment

As pet parents we want to see our animals not only thrive by the food choices we make for them, we want to also observe and know that they experience enjoyment from their meals as well. The mealtime experience has become increasingly important as pets become part of the family, further strengthening the human-animal bond. Adding variety by offering and rotating different flavors and textures will result in an elevated feeding experience, in addition to adding diversity to the animal's diet for maximum nutrient intake. To that point, studies have shown that when offered a choice of foods with different nutritional profiles, companion animals and livestock will naturally consume different amounts of the foods to balance their nutrient intake (Hewson-Hughes et al., 2013). Of course, due to the high acceptability of wet foods, pet parents need to be mindful of the total caloric intake, as the animals may over-consume due to food enjoyment rather than eating to their caloric requirements.

### The Best Approach?

The type of food is less important than the quality of ingredients used and the targeted nutritional approach to formulation. Whether the choice to feed wet pet food as a complete and balanced diet, or as an enhancement to the food bowl as a topper or supplement, it is critical to ensure to balance the amount of calories being offered to the animal by balancing the levels of foods offered. Maintaining a healthy weight



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and body condition score (*WSAVA BCS Dog*, *WSAVA BCS Cat*) are incredibly important considerations, therefore we highly recommend that the selected feeding regime is discussed with a veterinarian or an animal nutrition expert.

Many pet parents choose to rotate their pet's food or add variety to their daily meal – and wet pet food is a healthy option with multiple benefits!

**Our Commitment** – Leading with Technical Expertise – Leah and Jarrod are here to provide guidance and insights – do not hesitate to connect with us at Simmons Pet Food, [pfccomments@simfoods.com](mailto:pfccomments@simfoods.com). We would love to hear from you and be part of your pet's nutrition solution!

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