

Reading Lesson

B1+ Science: The Impact of Pet Food Industry

Reading

Read the text. Should we consider pets vs. the planet in the food production industry?

The Impact of Pet Food Industry

Few people would deny that owning a pet is a rewarding experience. Studies have shown that living with a dog or cat can help reduce stress, improve people's health, and increase their general levels of happiness. But what's good for humans and their pets is not always good for the planet. A recent study showed that the production of pet food has a significant impact on the environment. Meat consumption by pet dogs and cats can create up to 64 million tons of "greenhouses gases" each year, which is about the same as 13.5 million humans produce when driving their cars for a year. This is because animal food production requires more energy and resources than the production of plant-based foods. It also produces more waste.



In the USA alone, there are more than 163 million pet dogs and cats. More Americans own pets than in any other country in the world (although pet ownership is also increasing in some developing countries, especially in China). Most of these household animals are fed on a meat-based diet which usually comes in three main types: wet, dry, and raw. Wet foods usually come in cans or plastic pouches and include pieces of meat (typically chicken, beef, pork, or goat) in a sauce or jelly. Dry food, which almost always contains meat, includes cereals and biscuits which are often given as treats. Raw foods are frozen or dried pieces of meat that are suitable for consumption by pets but unsuitable for humans.

Recent analysis by UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability compared the amounts of meat in the most popular pet food brands to the amount of meat that the average American eats per year. The results suggested that pets represent a huge portion of the meat we produce, eat, and throw away each year. In fact, dogs and cats are responsible for about 25% of annual human meat-based consumption. In other words, if dogs and cats were a country, they would be fifth in global meat consumption, behind only Russia, Brazil, China, and the USA.

Reducing the rate of dog and cat ownership, perhaps in favor of other pets that offer similar health and emotional benefits, could reduce these impacts. But there are people who believe that the best solution to the problem lies in finding alternative sources of protein to make pet foods from. Cats must have meat in their diet because they need a protein called *taurine* which can only be found in animal sources such as meat and milk. Humans and dogs are able to produce taurine in their bodies, but cats can't do this so cats which are fed on a vegetarian diet will often have problems with their digestive system. Veterinarians point out that it is possible to feed a dog on a special vegan or vegetarian diet as long as this is done with the help of an animal nutritionist who can check the health of the dog.

One of the first vegan pet food products was first sold in the USA in 2018: a dog treat that is made from an Asian fungus called *koji*. It contains 10% more protein than you would find in a piece of steak. The company which makes the treats is also working on producing protein that can be "grown" in a laboratory. They have already developed an artificial mouse meat that is suitable for cats. Other companies are looking to use other sources of animal protein that already exist. One of these is insects. Crickets are high in iron, fats, and vitamins and dogs

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appear to love them. Although it is currently illegal to produce pet foods from insects in the USA, there are insect-based pet foods on the market in the UK, Italy, and Germany.

analysis (n): the activity of inspecting something in detail to understand it

artificial (adj): made by humans rather than happening naturally

crickets (n): small insects that move by leaping

digestive system (n): the part of the body that processes food

fungi (n): a type of plant that grows in wet or damp places, e.g., mushrooms

plant-based foods (n): foods that come from plants rather than meat

rewarding (adj): giving a person pleasure or happiness

significant (adj): important or very large

Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

consumption impact nutritionist protein resources

1. Scientists are concerned about the _____ that climate change is having on the environment.
2. _____ is an essential substance that is found in foods such as meat and eggs.
3. In order to stay healthy, try and keep your _____ of sugars and fats to a minimum.
4. I suggest seeing a/an _____ if you want to change your diet.
5. The world's natural _____ that humans use include coal, trees, and oil.

Comprehension

Choose the correct option.

1. Why is animal food production thought to be harmful to the environment?
 - a because a lot of it ends up in trash cans
 - b because different resources have to be used to produce it
 - c because there are more pet owners than in the past
2. Which of the following statements is true about pet food according to the article?
 - a Most pets prefer the taste of "wet" pet food.
 - b "Dry" pet food is rarely made with meat.
 - c "Raw" pet food comes from meat that humans can't eat.

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3. Why can't cats eat a vegetarian diet?
 - a because they suffer from digestive problems
 - b because they don't like plant-based foods
 - c because they need a particular type of protein in their diet

4. Which alternative source of protein is already being used to make dog food in the USA?
 - a insects
 - b mouse meat
 - c a type of fungi

5. What is the main point of the article?
 - a to show that pet food has a negative effect on the natural world
 - b to give pet owners information about the type of pet food to buy
 - c to prove that cats and dogs need to eat a meat-based diet

Thinking

Do you think vegan and vegetarian pet owners should feed their pets a vegan or vegetarian diet? Why or why not?