

# the Campaign for Real Pet Food



Joe Inglis, TV vet and driving force behind the Campaign for Real Pet Food, talks to Wendy Riley of DOG WORLD

**WR: As you are the spokesman for the campaign, our readers will be keen to find out about your background and what has driven you to begin this initiative?**

Jl: As a vet I've always been aware of the importance of nutrition when it comes to pet health, and over the years I've been in practice I've become increasingly concerned by the standard of some of the mainstream pet foods.

In 2005 I started my own pet food company with the aim of producing high-quality natural foods, and the more time I spent in the pet food world, the more worried I became by some of the practices that appeared to be going on in the pet food industry – and the potential harm these practices are causing for pets across the country.

**WR: Why do you feel it is important to reach breeders of pedigree dogs?**

Jl: As well as obviously directly looking after many dogs themselves, breeders are also responsible for educating thousands of new dog owners. Pet owners look to breeders for advice on all aspects of health when buying a new dog and, in the case of nutrition, often end up feeding a diet recommended by the breeder.

So it's vitally important for me to get my message about the importance of choosing the right food out to breeders and hope they pass it on to the dog owners of the future.

**WR: In layman's terms, what ingredients in dog food do you consider harmful?**

Jl: Mainly the artificial additives that fill so many dog foods nowadays. Pet food companies are allowed to use thousands of chemicals, many of which have been banned from use in the human food chain due to safety worries, and do not have to list these ingredients. Instead they use the term 'EC permitted additives' to hide these chemicals, and make it next to impossible for pet owners to really understand what's in the food they're feeding their dogs.

As well as artificial additives, many pet foods contain low grade ingredients including cheap fillers such as soya, and non-specific meat and vegetable matter listed under the terms 'meat and animal derivatives' and 'derivatives of vegetable origin', and while these ingredients are not likely to cause immediate harm, they are often well below the quality I believe our dogs require for a fit and healthy life.

**WR: What effect can these ingredients have on our dogs? What kind of behavioural changes can be expected with a bad diet?**

Jl: Behavioural problems are probably the most common health problem linked directly to diet. There appears to be a whole range of issues from poor attention spans and over-excitability right up to more serious issues with aggression that many behaviourists are now linking to diet.

In some cases it's so clear cut that behaviourists and trainers I've spoken to tell me they can tell what kind of diet a dog eats the minute it walks through their door. We've got lots of good case studies on the campaign website that really illustrate some of these issues.

Less clear cut, but worrying nonetheless, are the more sinister links between chemical additives such as blue 2 and the commonly used preservative BHA and serious disease such as cancer. Some of these chemicals are banned from the human food chain because of these links, but apparently many pet food manufacturers think they're fine for our pets to eat and they are used in the vast majority of mainstream pet foods.

**WR: What is the most common complaint, connected with nutrition, you see on the campaign forum?**

Jl: As well as behavioural issues, it's mainly general health problems – for example dogs who've had chronic health problems such as dermatitis or colitis which have improved when their diet has been changed.

**WR: Do you think you can achieve your aims through a campaign to change awareness or will you be lobbying the government to change the regulations regarding ingredients in dog food?**

Jl: The aim of the campaign is primarily to educate dog and cat owners so they can make informed decisions about what they feed to their animals. We believe that consumer power is the best way to change the industry, and if more and more animal owners are questioning what they feed and taking the time to read the label and ask themselves 'am I really happy to feed this to my dog?' then the big manufacturers will have to take notice and change their ways.

However, we also recognise the importance of regulation and we are talking to bodies such as the Pet Food Manufacturers Association to try to bring them on board with what we're trying to do and lobby the European authorities to tighten up labelling regulations and push for a ban on certain artificial additives.

**WR: Is it more costly to produce a food which is natural, food that doesn't contain the ingredients that you are campaigning against?**

Jl: Not necessarily – if you look at most of the good quality natural foods they are usually very similar in price to many 'non-natural' brands. In a way you are getting less when you buy a 'real pet food' – but the less is less nasty stuff such as artificial colours, preservatives and flavours, so in this case, less really is more!

**WR: What is the overall aim that you and the other campaigners are hoping to achieve?**

Jl: We are aiming to educate dog and cat owners about what really goes into pet foods, how these ingredients can affect their animals, and how to make an informed decision about what diet is best suited to their pet.

Our goal is a well-informed pet owning public who are not willing to accept poor quality and potentially dangerous ingredients in their pets' food and demand – and get – much higher standards both in terms of ingredients, and openness and honest ingredient declarations from pet food manufacturers.

**WR: What timescale are you working to? How quickly do you think it is possible for a change to take place?**

Jl: The campaign started in September last year and since then I think we've achieved a great deal. Through our PR campaign and website, millions of pet owners have started to think more critically about how they feed their pets and I think we're starting to see a real change in attitudes across the pet world.

Even the big manufacturers are starting to take notice – I recently heard from an employee at one of the UK's biggest pet food companies that an email had been circulated among all staff telling them how to deal with enquiries about the campaign and the ingredients in their foods.

If these big companies start to understand what we're trying to do and embrace positive change, we really will have made a big difference – but I'm realistic to know that this change isn't going to happen overnight.

**WR: What kind of backing do you already have to support the campaign?**

Jl: The campaign is supported by a range of individuals and companies, from pet-loving celebrities such as Matt Baker, Deborah Meaden and Anthony Head, to dog behaviourists including Victoria Stilwell and Gwen Bailey, and a wide range of natural pet food companies.

This support has provided the funding we've needed to get our message out there – but in such a big industry it's definitely a case of David versus Goliath and we need all the support we can get.

Individuals can pledge their support on the website, and the more names we have behind the campaign, the more influence we can have.