

Talking it through will help customers make the right choice

Explanations and questions are equally important when you're trying to help pet owners make the right choices on nutrition

Customers want to know more about what their pets' need – and retailers need to know what questions to ask to help them make the right choices. Explaining what terms on pet food labels mean will boost customers' confidence in you and in what you sell.

COMPLETE OR COMPLEMENTARY?

"Complete means that the product contains all the nutrients a pet needs to support its daily life when fed as directed," explains Nicole Paley from the PFMA. "A complementary food needs other food to provide nutritional balance, perhaps a mixer."

COMPOSITION OR INGREDIENTS

Ingredients are listed under the heading 'composition' in descending order of weight. "This can be indicated by category, eg meat and animal derivatives set by regulations, or the label might provide a full list of individual ingredients," says Nicole.

"Meat and animal derivatives' describes animal-based ingredients used in pet food – not including dairy, which has its own category – which are by-products of the human food industry.

"There will also be a percentage declaration; for example, 'meat and animal deriva-

tives (4% chicken)'. This is a legal requirement which represents the minimum percentage content of the named ingredient guaranteed to be present.

VARIOUS SUGARS

This may refer to sucrose, fructose and glucose, or honey; all natural products. The PFMA says that sugar may be added to cat foods as an energy source, as they can easily convert sugar to usable energy through normal digestion. Small amounts of sugar may be added to help with the cooking process.

SODIUM AND CHLORIDE

"Sodium is an essential nutrient for dogs and cats, along with chloride, and is important for fluid balance in the body," says Nicole.

Sodium may also be included in prepared pet food in the form of table salt, sometimes

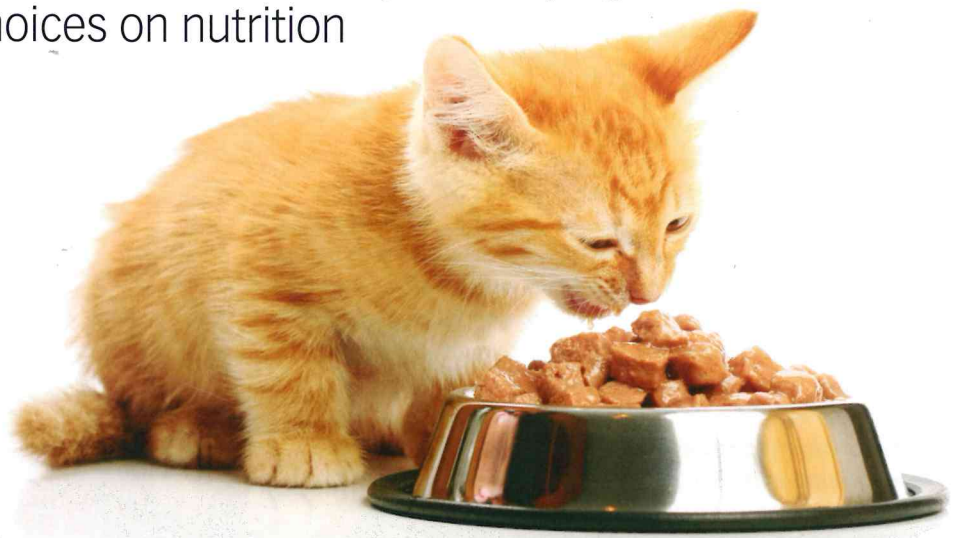
listed on the ingredients panel as salt, to enhance taste. There are guidelines on sodium levels for cats and the levels used in pet foods.

ADDITIVES

Additives include vitamins, flavours, antioxidants and colours. Most of the additives used in pet food are also used in foods for people.

ANALYTICAL CONSTITUENTS

In this section of the label, you will find crude ash, inorganic matter or incinerated residue expressed as a percentage. They refer to the mineral content of the food and are not added as ingredients.



OVER THE COUNTER CHAT

There are some guidelines you should always talk about when a customer needs advice. Even when someone is confident about purchasing decisions, talking about their pets and their management routine can help build your relationship.

- Clean, fresh water should always be available to all pets.
- Opened cans and pouches should be stored in the

fridge and used within two days.

- Dry pet food is available in resealable packets, or can be stored in an airtight container until the 'best before' date.
- Feed treats responsibly – reduce the size of the meal accordingly and don't feed so much that the nutritional balance of the diet is disrupted.
- Keep food and water

bowls clean, wash and rinse them well, separately from human food dishes. Plastic bowls may have to be replaced periodically.

- Feed an amount to maintain good body condition – use the PFMA Pet Size-O-Meter to check a pet's size and shape: www.pfma.org.uk
- Feed according to life stage, size, and breed or type.

Continued from page 13

but there are clearly different attitudes and motivations for feeding them. Mr White suggested that a better understanding of owner perceptions of treat-feeding behaviour could play an important part in dealing with the growing pet obesity epidemic.

● **John Lowe, a nutritionist and founder of Tuttons Hill Nutrition**, gave observations on energy and dry matter intakes of pet rabbits, pointing out that the lifestyle of a

sedentary pet rabbit may be very different to the farmed rabbits which have traditionally been used to develop feeding recommendations. The study concluded that free-choice, good quality hay with limited amounts (25-40g/kg body weight per day) was an appropriate model.

● **Wanda McCormick, from Moulton College**, looked at feed selection in guinea pigs. She explained that guinea pigs feed selectively when offered a commercial

mix, with selection based more on the shape of individual feed components rather than colour, with the ease of manipulation of food items making ecological sense.

● **Alex Hawkins from the University of Edinburgh** outlined disorders recorded in reptiles attending primary care veterinary practices in England. His study found that decreased appetite, ocular problems and skin disorders were the three most common primary presenting problems.

● **Katerina Nicola from Moulton College** discussed food colour preferences in avian species. Psittacines have a wider colour perception than humans, with a theory that birds have evolved to choose coloured food based on their antioxidant levels. Canaries have not been studied in as much detail, and are not thought to have a general preference for colour. A reported preference for undyed seed by finches and canaries may be explained by

the fact that this is their regular diet in natural conditions.

● **Jack James, from Pontus Research** discussed the use of insect meal as a protein source for goldfish. Insect larvae thrive on waste produced during food processing, and insects are a natural food source for many freshwater aquarium fish, so this seems like a useful, sustainable new way of feeding pet fish, rather than using the traditional fish-meal which has become scarcer and more expensive.