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## **Pet Owners and Veterinary Professionals Divided on Pet Food Claims**

*Pet Owners and Veterinary Professionals Divided on Grain-free, Clean Meats, Raw Meat Diets, and Other Popular Pet Food Trends in Latest Association for Pet Obesity Prevention Survey*

**Ocean Isle, North Carolina – June 19, 2019** – U.S. pet owners and veterinary professionals continue to be divided on many popular pet food trends, according to the 2018 [Association for Pet Obesity Prevention](#) (APOP) annual survey. “Pet owners are inundated by confusing and conflicting nutritional information from a wide variety of sources,” says APOP founder, Dr. Ernie Ward. “This means veterinary professionals often must dispel pet nutrition myths and decipher advertising to help pet owners choose the best diet.” Dr. Julie Churchill, a veterinary nutritionist and APOP Board member, agrees. “In a time of numerous pet food recalls and FDA investigations, it’s more confusing than ever for pet owners looking for answers. It’s important to seek the advice of veterinary healthcare providers when choosing the best food for their pet.” The online questionnaire was completed by 1,156 pet owners and 574 veterinary professionals from October 12 to December 31, 2018.

### ***Grain-free and Low-Glycemic Diets***

Pet owners and veterinarians continue to disagree on the health benefits of grain-free pet foods, but both groups have decreased their support of these popular diets for dogs and cats. 40% of dog owners and 45% of cat owners agree grain-free diets are healthy, compared to 13% of veterinary professionals who are dog owners and 15% who own cats. “I don’t know” was reported by 36% of dog owners (18% veterinary professionals) and 35% of cat owners (14% veterinary professionals). In 2017, 45% of pet owners and 22% of veterinary professionals believed grain-free options were healthier.

Many dog foods are beginning to explore the use of “low-glycemic” claims. APOP found that 27.7% of dog owners and 20.3% of veterinary professionals who owned dogs reported that low-glycemic foods were healthier for dogs. 62.5% of dog owners and 41.4% of veterinary professionals responded “I don’t know,” indicating confusion about the potential health benefits of low-glycemic dog foods.

### ***Alternative Pet Food Proteins***

With the recent success of plant-based meats such as Beyond Meat and Impossible Burger, APOP asked pet owners which alternative proteins they would consider feeding their dog or cat. Clean meat was the highest-ranking alternative protein of all cat (55.2%) and dog (55.8%) owners reporting they would consider feeding clean meat and 27.9% of cat and 25.2% of dog owners responded “Maybe.” Cultured poultry was ranked second highest, with 23.8% cat and 25% dog of dog owners saying they would consider feeding and 40.1% cats and 32.8% dog owners responding “Maybe.” Pea protein was rated “Yes” 17.4% for cats and 21.8% for dog owners, with “Maybe” reaching 29.8% for cats and 33.7% for dogs. Cricket and insect proteins earned 17.4% of cat and 14.4% of dog owners interest and about 27% reported “Maybe.” 13.1% of cat owners said “Yes” to cultured mouse and 32.8% “Maybe.” 23.4% of dog owners said “Yes” to cultured beef and 34.2% “Maybe.” Cultured, lab-grown, and cell-based meats averaged 13% “Yes” and 30% “Maybe” for both groups. About 10% of all pet owners said they’d feed soy, mushroom, or fungal proteins and approximately 25% said they would consider these alternative pet food proteins.

### ***Dry, Canned, and Raw Diets***

The majority of pet owners and veterinary professionals preferred feeding dry kibble pet food. 82% of all cat owners and 78% of dog owners stated they fed dry pet food “exclusively” or “most of the time.” Canned or

moist foods were fed “exclusively” by 8% of cat owners and 4% of dog owners with 38% of cat and 14% of dog owners responded “most of the time.”

Raw diets (both commercial and home-prepared) and homemade pet foods were “never” fed to over 88% of cats and 73% of dogs. When asked if raw meat diets are healthier than commercial pet foods, 29.4% of dog owners 22% of cat owners agreed compared to 5.4% of veterinary professionals with dogs and less than 1% with cats. 39.9% of dog owners (12.3% veterinary professionals) and 41.9% of cat owners (9.3% veterinary professionals) answered “I don’t know.”

***Pet Food Purchase Influencers***

APOP found pet owners and veterinary professionals were influenced by different pet food marketing messages. “Free from” claims divided the two groups the most. “Corn and soy free” pet foods were reported as influential in purchase decisions by 45% of pet owners compared to only 10% of veterinary professionals. “No by-products” was desired by 42% of pet owners and 15% of veterinary professionals. “Non-GMO” was rated highly by 26% of pet owners and only 5% of veterinary professionals. “Organic” was selected by 29% of pet owners and 5% of veterinary professionals, and “Cage-free chicken or eggs” was important to 18% of pet owners and just 1% of veterinary professionals, followed by “Pasture or wild-caught meats” at 27% and 4% respectively. “Sourced and made in the U.S.A.” was persuasive for 41% of pet owners compared to 25% of veterinary professionals. The biggest pet food purchase influencer reported by veterinary professionals was “Manufacturer or employee discount” at 36% (5% pet owners) and 38% responded “None affect their purchase” (24% pet owners). “High protein” scored relatively well with 32% of pet owners and 13% of veterinary professionals, while “Low-glycemic” (11% and 6%), and “Portion control packaging” (4% and <1%) completed the list.

***Pet Food Purchasing***

33.3% of pet owners stated they purchased pet food from an online store during the past year, a specialty pet store (33.3%), or big chain store (28.3%). Grocery store purchases were reported by 20% of pet owners and only 8.3% of veterinary professionals. The majority of veterinary professionals purchased food at a veterinary clinic (52.9%) compared to 12.4% of pet owners. Veterinary professionals also said they used online stores (31.5%), specialty pet stores (28.3%), and big chain stores (19.1%).

**About the Research**

The annual obesity prevalence survey is conducted by APOP. Veterinary practices assessed the body condition scores (BCS) of every dog and cat patient they saw for a regular wellness exam on a given day in October. BCS was based on the standardized nine-point whole integer scale and actual weight. The latest survey included the assessment of 1,560 dogs and 646 cats by 146 veterinary clinics representing 41 U.S. states during October and November 2018.

<b>DOGS</b>			<b>CATS</b>		
n = 1560			n = 646		
Median Age = 6.5 years			Median Age = 7.4 years		
<b>BCS (1 to 9)</b>			<b>BCS (1 to 9)</b>		
1 to 3	17	1.1%	1 to 3	13	2.1%
4 to 5	672	43.1%	4 to 5	249	38.5%
6 to 7	576	36.9%	6 to 7	166	25.7%
8 to 9	295	18.9%	8 to 9	218	33.8%

Male	5%			Male	4%	
Male neutered	47.6%			Male neutered	43.6%	
Female	7.2%			Female	5.8%	
Female spayed	40.2%			Female spayed	46.6%	

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### **About the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP)**

The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2005 by Dr. Ernie Ward with the primary mission of documenting pet obesity levels in the United States to raise awareness of the issue and its negative impact on pets. The APOP Board of Directors is made up of veterinary practitioners, nutritionists, surgeons, and internal medicine specialists. APOP conducts annual research to substantiate pet obesity prevalence levels in the United States and offers resources and tools to veterinarians and pet owners to better equip them to recognize and fight pet obesity. More information about APOP can be found on their website [www.PetObesityPrevention.org](http://www.PetObesityPrevention.org).