

**B**y now, many of us have made and broken our new year's resolutions to eat healthier. So why not make a resolution that's a lot easier to keep—to help our pets eat healthier?

I'm one of those dog-crazy dykes who'd do anything for my beloved pooch, including cook her food from scratch, which I've done for most of her seven years with me. It started out as a necessity—she has a delicate stomach and can't tolerate commercial foods—but now that I know what's in the stuff I used to buy, I'd never go back to it even if I could.

Fortunately, my dog weighs just 14 pounds, and in an hour I make a batch that lasts three weeks in the freezer. If I had a dog family that weighed in at more than 300 pounds—as a friend of mine does—I would need industrial-sized vats along with a commercial freezer for storage. In considering this option, size does matter!

So when I heard two gay guys in Oregon had started a raw pet food company, I had to check it out. Which then led me to learn far more than I ever wanted to know. In fact, some lists of commercial pet food ingredients were so disgusting I couldn't keep reading. (They commonly contain recycled rancid restaurant grease, peanut hulls, carcasses of diseased animals, feathers and so on, ad nauseam.)

I read books; digested numerous informative Web sites; interviewed vets, pet keepers and food makers; and conducted a monthlong taste trial with six cats and five dogs. And because we queerfolk tend to dote on our furry families, lots of *Just Out* readers should welcome this wake-up call.

### What's really in those crunchy bits?

**G**rowing up on an Indiana farm in the 1920s, my father always had a dog—who, like other pets at the time, was fed leftovers from his family's table. One day Skippy would get ham scraps, baked potato skins, broccoli stems and maybe some eggs. The next day it might be an apple, a meaty beef bone and a heel of homemade bread soaked in a bit of milk. Skippy thrived on his diet of great variety and had few health problems.

Then along came Alpo. And by the 1950s, when I got my first dog, the convenience of store-bought food had won out over the old ways.

Soon the big companies convinced us that their products provided complete balanced nutrition and that for optimum health pets should eat the same food for the rest of their lives. Like drive-through restaurants and frozen entrees, prepackaged pet food was touted as just one more modern culinary convenience.

But along the way most of the companies got swallowed up by huge corporations that also make human food, and thus was born a symbiotic relationship that spelled bad news for our pets.

According to the Animal Protection Institute, a national advocacy nonprofit founded in 1968, "Pet food provides a market for slaughterhouse offal, grains considered 'unfit for human consumption' and similar waste products to be turned into profit,

# WHEN ONLY THE BEST WILL DO

Finding optimal ways to feed our furry friends

by Oriana Green

including intestines, udders, esophagi and possibly diseased and cancerous animal parts."

Its literature goes on to say, "The cooking methods used by pet food manufacturers—such as rendering, extruding (a heat-and-pressure system used to puff dry foods into nuggets or kibble) and baking—do not necessarily destroy the hormones used to fatten livestock, or drugs such as antibiotics or the barbiturates used to euthanize animals."

But what the extremely high temperatures do destroy is much of the nutritional value in the food—so synthetic vitamins must be added at the end of the process, along with chemicals to increase palatability.

According to British vet Kathy Partridge, "I do believe all commercial foods should be judiciously supplemented (preferably with real, raw foods), as they are completely dead and processed."

She also is opposed to the heavy grain content in most commercial pet foods, because dogs and cats are primarily carnivores. "Dogs don't have the complex digestive tract that cows or horses have for breaking down plant material."

In the 1990s consumer interest in more healthful eating inspired some companies to stress the naturalness of their pet foods, but Partridge also comes down hard on those. "Science Diet was the all-time worst food I fed. My dogs were a mess of skin and gastrointestinal problems. No Pro-Plan, Eukanuba, Iams, NutroMax, Sensible Choice, etc. They're all very similar; lots and lots of grains in proportion to animal protein."

Jeff Judkins, a vet since 1984, opened one of Portland's first holistic practices in 1995. He previously practiced in Alaska, where he observed hardworking sled dogs "who eat only fish, mostly salmon, and they do very, very well."

He is adamant about cat diets in particular. "I



A rose is a Rose is a raw food lover

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS



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Dr. Jeff Judkins believes dogs have evolved more into omnivores

think dry cat food is not healthy... They're meant to eat mice and birds, not grain. I think feeding dry cat food is responsible for hyperthyroidism; it didn't exist in cats 30 years ago. I also see a lot of dental problems in cats who've eaten dry food all their lives," he warns.

### Naturally, there's a better way

**P**et keepers have several alternatives: supplementing the best-quality dry food with fresh ingredients; preparing batches of food at home; and buying frozen or freeze-dried raw food. Especially key if your cat or dog is overweight or showing any signs of ill health, a better diet will prolong Fluffy's life and improve the quality of it.

Holistic veterinary pioneer Richard Pitcairn recommends raw food diets and believes variety in an animal's diet is good emotionally as well as physically. He puts it in human terms: "Think about eating the same thing for the rest of your life."

Partridge also urges a raw food diet, calling it "critical to good health," because it contains "enzymes, good bacteria and other life forces." She notes that planting a raw potato will