
Pet Feed Choices

The new University of Nebraska Animal Science program on companion animals has attracted new students to animal science. Dr. Lisa Karr-Lilenthal heads up the teaching efforts and currently is advising 30 students in the option. This week I am going to share some of her ideas on pet feed choices for our pet owners here in Southeast Nebraska.

There are lots of choices in pet feeds. Here are some ideas about choosing pet feeds which will meet the pets needs for protein, energy, and fiber. A wise feed consultant once told me the best dog feed in the world is of no value unless the dog eats the stuff. Like you and I it takes more than chocolate to meet our dietary needs, but the quality diet still has to taste and feel right to the pet.

The best choice usually is commercial pet feeds. In most cases, choose dry feed over canned feeds. Dry feed is less expensive and easier to handle. Storing is easier, and it also provides the mechanical action of chewing to an animal, which helps clean a pet's teeth.

Commercial pet feed is both nutritionally complete and balanced. It will have the protein, energy, and minerals for a balanced diet. Commercial feed ensures adequate nutrition for a pet.

People should read the nutrition label and the feeding instructions on pet foods they feed pets. Choose a pet feed based on the pet's life stage. Nutrient requirements change as an animal ages. Puppies and kittens need higher protein and other nutrients to support growth. Adult animals have lower nutrient requirements than during growth. The key to feeding adult animals is to adjust feed intake based on the animal's activity level to prevent obesity. Senior animals tend to be less active and therefore their energy requirements may decrease even more. In addition, senior diets adjust other nutrient levels to account for changes in metabolism due to aging. One thing people may not realize is that more expensive feeds could actually save them more money and hassle than less expensive feeds.

Higher-priced feeds have is the right type of fiber sources. Less expensive feeds add more fiber, which is a cheaper ingredient that fills a pet up. They types of fiber, such as cellulose, used in these feeds often is poorly used and results in increased stool quantities. This may not be of concerns for rural residents, but to the kennel owner or city dweller, the issue is more important. More expensive feeds have fiber source, such as beet pulp, chicory root or inulin, that is most easily broken down in the large intestines and provides more health benefits from fiber. This kind of fiber leads to less risk for gastrointestinal diseases.

Older animals may benefit from diets containing items such as glucosamine, a glycoprotein that aids joint health. Less expensive feeds use more filler ingredients and are less nutrient dense, which means more of that food needs to be fed to meet the animal's nutrient needs. The higher-priced feed could save on multiple trips to the store to buy more feed.

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