

# The Whole Dog Journal™



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A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

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# End of the List?

*No, but I can dream.*

BY NANCY KERNS

**L**ike any old fight, it's hard to recall all the details. Suffice to say that, many years ago, when we agreed to make it a convention to publish a review of dry dog foods every February, my boss (publisher of WDJ) and I argued for hours about whether or not I had to prepare a list of "approved foods" to accompany the article. It's become the number one feature in WDJ that readers cite as their reason for subscribing, so it turns out that my boss wins the argument. But I HATE the list. I really, really *haaaaaate* it. Why? Let me describe my top four reasons.

## 1 BECAUSE I WOULD RATHER TEACH PEOPLE TO FISH THAN GIVE THEM A FISH.

That is, I would rather people read the article accompanying the list so they understand exactly how we identify the foods we approve of – and can easily determine whether or not the food they buy would earn our approval, and why.

My boss's response: "Nance, I'm sorry to break it to you, but there are a certain number of subscribers who are never, ever going to read the article. They just want the list."

This whole idea gives me heartburn, but after a few years, I realized he was right. For months after the publication of each article, in which I explain exactly why the products that are on "the list" are there, I receive letters that ask why foods A, B, and C are on the list, and foods X, Y, and Z are not. Since the answers to the questions are present in the article, I have to conclude that my boss is right: some people are readers; some people just want a list.

## 2 BECAUSE THE PRESENCE OF A FOOD ON WDJ'S "APPROVED FOODS" LIST (OR ANYONE'S LIST) DOES NOT MEAN IT'S "BEST" FOR YOUR DOG.

It's a starting place, no more. It is one of many products that meet our selection criteria. But it doesn't mean, and couldn't possibly mean, that it's going to suit every dog it's fed to. If people read the article, they will understand how to identify the attributes of top-quality foods and traits of lesser-quality products, *and* how to determine whether a particular food is working well for their dog, and what to do if it is not. The latter is just as important as the former.

## 3 BECAUSE LISTS CAN NEVER BE COMPLETE.

There are far more foods that meet our selection criteria and would qualify as an "approved food" than we will ever be able to discover and list. There are many *more* products that would qualify for a "DO NOT BUY" list (if we had one), but it would fill the entire issue. And singling out just a few (as examples) always seems unfair, because the fact is, the majority of foods on the market would meet our criteria for this. By understanding our selection criteria, a reader should be able to easily determine whether a product she sees in a store would qualify for our "approved food" list or a "DO NOT BUY" list.

## 4 BECAUSE STUFF HAPPENS.

The moment a list is published, events take place that render parts of the list incorrect. Companies fold, formulas are changed, manufacturers are switched, recalls occur. And there in print is a list saying WDJ approves of the product.

Here's how I would *love* the list to be used – and, in fact, all joking aside, how it's already used by many subscribers: As a starting place for an owner to find products she's never seen before; as a comparison tool, to help pet food buyers identify the differences between products at different price points; and as a handy resource list, with contact numbers and manufacturing sites already listed, in case a recall happens and an owner wants to contact the maker of a certain product as quickly as possible.

This year's list of "approved dry dog foods" starts on page 8.

NK

# Change Is Good

*The pet food industry as a whole is improving. Time for the “super-premium” pet food makers to raise the bar again.*

BY NANCY KERNS

**S**ixteen years ago, when WDJ first assessed the “premium” segment of the dry dog food market, we didn’t find many products that met our selection criteria. The companies that made foods that we would consider top quality were small and not well known. The vast majority of foods on the market contained abominable ingredients (such as “meat and bone meal” and “animal fat”) and the companies that produced them were not very consumer-friendly – and downright contemptuous of a consumer-oriented newsletter with canine health activist readers! Even the companies that offered the highest-quality products on the market, the best of the best, were reticent about their ingredient sources and manufacturing locations.

That was then; this is now. Today, the segment of the market commonly referred to by the pet food industry as (variably) natural, holistic, or super premium (none of those being legal definitions) has experienced absolutely explosive growth. The entire pet food market has grown, but the performance of the type of products that meet our selection criteria (detailed on pages 6-7) has been remarkable.

So it shouldn’t come as a surprise that even the biggest players in the pet food industry have taken notice; some have been taking experimental steps in this direction for a number of years. And today, companies like Colgate-Palmolive’s Hill’s Pet Nutrition and Procter & Gamble’s Eukanuba offer products that meet WDJ’s selection criteria.

You may ask, “Are those foods *truly* better than they used to be? Or does

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**For years we’ve been predicting this would happen, and now it has. Some large pet food companies have introduced products that feature ingredients that are comparable to those found in “super premium” pet foods. It’s your move, premium / natural / holistic pet food makers.**

WDJ’s selection criteria need to become more stringent?”

The answer is “Yes” to *both* questions.

## WHAT’S GOING ON

“Consumer demand” gets the credit for the recent improvements in formulas at larger-scale pet food makers. After years of defending their ingredients, formulas, and products, the smart companies have found ways to offer products with the kind of ingredients that discerning pet

owners want to see on the label. It’s *doubly* smart, because these changes actually give them a leg up on their competition, even if they are new to the “super premium” niche.

Large companies usually own and operate their own manufacturing plants, which invariably leads to more consistent production (and fewer quality control failures and recalls) than small companies, which almost always have to rely on third-party “contract manufacturers” to make their foods. (There are plenty of good co-packers out there, but when problems do occur, it’s always more difficult for a pet food company to determine the problem’s true cause and take steps to keep it from happening again if they are not the ones at the helm of the production facility.)

Also, gigantic companies have the financial backing needed to write big ingredient procurement contracts. In this way, they can effectively lock up the biggest, most consistent domestic sources of some ingredients.

Consumer demand also seems to be at least partially responsible for the change in attitudes by the pet food companies’ customer service and/or public relations people. The blanket excuse, “Sorry, that’s proprietary information,” is increasingly rejected as a legitimate response by consumers who are willing to pay top dollar for a reliable product from a communicative company. If you call a company and either can’t reach a live human being, or can’t get a straight answer to a few basic questions about the



company's ingredient sources or manufacturing location, well, now you have options. You can (and should) say, "Well, thanks but no thanks; I guess I'll buy my dog's food elsewhere."

## MORE CAN BE BETTER

Here's another trend in the market, and one that enables large pet food companies to maintain and defend their historically best-selling products *and* offer newer products with formulations that fly in the face of the corporate history: the rapid proliferation of new lines and products.

Each size of each product is given a unique "stock keeping unit" (SKU, pronounced "skew") identification number. A decade ago, it was typical for a small-sized company that sold "natural/holistic" dry dog foods to offer three to five formulas, with each product offered in perhaps three different bag sizes – in this case, a maximum of 15 SKUs. Today, even small companies may have dozens of SKUs, and the larger pet food makers may have *hundreds*.

There are several reasons for the surge of SKUs. At some point, the pet food companies realized that the more pointedly their products seemed to be aimed at specific dogs, the better they sold. Why would you buy a food for "adult" dogs when you can buy one that's *just* for Yorkshire Terriers? Or, alternatively, for "small indoor dogs," or "toy breed senior" dogs? It's very appealing to think that the food has unique attributes that make it *just right* for your dog. This sort of specificity may also relieve some anxiety on the part of the owner who's not sure about which food they should buy.

Consumers are also funny about product sizes; they like having more options than just a very small and a very large bag.

Additionally, a large number of SKUs in any given store has a powerful affect on consumers in the store. Think about it: It makes a big impression if you are walking down a long pet food aisle and you come to a section that has nothing but Pup Crunchies Brand foods from floor to ceiling for about 12 linear feet, and the bags are all different colors and sizes. Hey! This Pup Crunchies company must really be something!

And finally, as mentioned earlier, it gives the gigantic pet food companies an opportunity to offer products of varying quality – and corresponding price points. This way, they can participate in the natural/holistic/premium market and offer their more conventionally formulated, lower-priced foods, too.

## THE NEXT STEP

Some of you may skeptical about the sincerity of some of the companies on our annual "approved dry dog foods" list (the 2013 list appears in this issue, starting on page 8). Personally, I'm happy to see the industry shift toward the use of better ingredients in more products; the changes will result in a nationwide net gain in the number of dogs eating better foods. And if the pet food companies who are serious about competing in the "super premium" market are improving their transparency and consumer relations, we *all* win.

But with mainstream pet food makers now selling foods with ingredient lists that are comparable to products that have been on WDJ's "approved foods" lists for

years, what will the companies with the deepest commitment to super-premium, *ne plus ultra* foods do to stay ahead of the game?

I don't know what they'll do, but I know what revolutionary development I'd like to see! The problem is, it's currently impossible – not because it can't be done, but because it's sort of against the law.

## TASTES LIKE CHICKEN

Long-time readers know that WDJ has always recommended choosing products that contain whole, named meats or meat meals – for example, chicken or chicken meal. This sort of ingredient has always been described to me – and I have in turn promoted it to you – as the best source of animal protein you can find on a dog food label.

I've gradually become aware, though, that there is quite a range of products that are available to pet food companies that can all be legally described as, for example, "chicken."

First, let me describe what goes on in a meat processing plant. The primary mission of these plants is to convert recently living animals into different cuts of meat for human consumption. The most valuable products that emerge from a meat plant are the big cuts (think roasts, steaks, chops, or in the case of poultry, whole bird bodies, breasts, and legs), but there are lots of smaller bits of meat that get used in things like hot dogs or soup.

Every bit of meat that is going to be used for human food is handled in a strictly prescribed way, in order to be kept clean as it moves down the production line; and as soon as each bit has been processed to its intended state, it is chilled, whether in a package for retail sale or in large wholesale containers.

Along the production lines, though, there are lots of places where certain bits of meat are separated from the products that are headed to human consumption. These include whole or parts of carcasses of animals that, for various possible reasons, did not pass inspection after slaughter; specific *parts* of the animal that failed inspection down the line; stuff that fell on the floor; tiny bits of trimmings; and, in the case of poultry, meaty bones (including necks, wings,



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**Too many choices? Never! It's good to have options, and a rising tide lifts all boats.**

and “frames” – the main body of the bird after most of the meat has been stripped from it). There are locations all along the meat processing line where some of these materials are diverted to bins that are clearly marked “inedible” – the legal word for meat that cannot be used for human consumption.

Unlike “edible” meats, inedible meats don’t have to be kept chilled once they have been diverted to an “inedible” bin (chilling keeps any bacteria that may be present from proliferating). Of course, they *can* be kept chilled, but once they have been diverted to inedible meat containers, they must be “denatured” (marked with a substance, usually powdered charcoal, to further identify them as inedible) and stored separately from any edible products in the plant.

Generally, though, inedible meats are not chilled, but are diverted for transportation, either directly to pet food companies or to a renderer, where they will be made into a meat meal. Bacterial contamination of the material doesn’t seem to bother anyone; it’s generally accepted that any bacteria present will be killed during production of the pet food (extrusion or baking) or rendering of the meat meal.

The legal definition of “chicken” used in pet food is “the clean combination of flesh and skin with or without accompanying bone, derived from the parts or whole carcasses of chicken or a combination thereof, exclusive of feathers, heads, feet and entrails.” But in practice, this definition can be applied to anything from:

- A tanker truck full of chicken skin, bones, fat, bits of meat, and chicken meat that failed inspection for human consumption.
- Chicken “frames” (a frame is the skeleton of a chicken’s body after the feet and head have been cut off, and the guts and *most* of the meat has been stripped off).
- The flesh (muscle meat), with or without skin, with or without accompanying bone, removed from freshly slaughtered chickens.
- The same as above, but kept and transported in a chilled or frozen state to the manufacturing site.
- Any combination of the above.

All of the above items could legally appear on a product label as “chicken.” And there is no legal way for a pet food company to tell you (and no way for you to decisively confirm) that what the company uses in the food you feed your dog is “human quality” – clean, inspected-and-passed, chilled chicken meat / skin / bone from freshly slaughtered birds – and *not* the carcasses or parts of diseased chickens, and the bones and skin left over from human food production.

Why? Because, by law, NO ingredient that is used in pet food can be called “human quality” – even if it is, really. Upon arrival at a pet food plant, even the most pristine, expensive, USDA-inspected-and-passed ingredient becomes “inedible.” (I’ve heard different accounts from various pet food company owners; some say it becomes inedible the moment the truck drives onto the pet food manufacturing site; others say it’s the moment the truck’s door are opened at a pet food facility.)

There are reasons galore for this random-seeming designation, but they all boil down to this: the government doesn’t want anyone to get confused and think that pet food is safe for humans to eat. If pet food companies are allowed to say that their products contain “human grade” or “human quality” ingredients, people might get confused and try to eat it! Or feed it to their kids!

Personally, I’d like to feed my dogs food that contains only clean, chilled, meat /skin/ bones/ and yes, even organs from freshly slaughtered, healthy animals. Some companies claim to be using ingredients of that quality already – in fact, I’ve seen it with my own eyes! I’ve been to pet food plants where dry dog food was being made, right in front of me, with chilled or frozen chicken meat that was being taken right out of boxes or bins clearly stamped “US Inspected and Passed by Department of Agriculture.” But there currently isn’t any legal way for pet food makers to make this claim.

Wouldn’t it be great if there was a legal definition that could identify ingredients of this quality, so that pet food companies who are genuinely using these ingredients could be conclusively identified? And wouldn’t it be amazing if those companies whose representatives who hint or say they use these ingredients – *but aren’t* – could *also* be identified (and enforcement action could be taken against them)?

## THE HOLY GRAIL

The fact is, millions of American dogs are currently eating thousands of tons of food that is made with what sounds like the worst possible stuff that could emerge from a slaughterhouse – and they are apparently doing just fine. There are no studies anywhere suggesting that there is a correlation between the illness of any dogs who are fed diets made of disgusting, bacteria-laden bits of diseased animals, and the health of dogs who eat only food made of inspected-and-passed muscle meat.

Studies or no studies, many of us are willing to pay fantastic prices to be assured that the food we feed our dogs contains only nice clean meat. Couldn’t the companies that are deeply dedicated to making those products find some way to push regulators for a definition that could help consumers know they are really getting what they are paying for?

There must be a way. The pet food companies know what *they* are paying their ingredient suppliers for; indeed, they can specify whatever they want from their meat suppliers. For example, they can specify that they will pay only for chicken meat containing only a certain amount of ash (which indicates the amount of bone that’s included), only a certain amount of fat (which indicates the amount of skin that’s included), and only a certain amount of lipid oxidation (oxidized fat; the beginning of rot). High-protein, low-ash, low peroxide chicken is expensive, so the products that contain it will be, too. But a high price is no guarantee of high-quality ingredients.

When the companies that actually do use ingredients like that find a way to legally and verifiably prove it, you’ll see a brand new, two-tiered list of “approved foods” in WDJ. The top tier will probably be quite short, and the food quite expensive. But I’d be willing to bet the farm that there will be owners who would pay whatever it costs.

## PRODUCT REVIEW

In the meantime, we still have our present standards, and they still identify products that are better than the majority of dry dog foods. These standards are described on the next page, and a partial list of some of the products that meet our standards – a starting point, a list of some good examples – begins on page 7. 🐾

*Nancy Kerns is Editor of WDJ.*

# WDJ's Approved Dry Dog Foods for 2013

*Read below to understand how the foods listed on the following pages met our selection criteria (and whether your dog's food might, too).*

BY NANCY KERNS

Identifying a superior-quality dog food is not that difficult; I'm going to tell you how to do it in just a minute. But it may be difficult to find foods of this quality if you live far from an urban center or an independent pet supply store run by someone with more than a passing interest in canine nutrition. It may be even more difficult to afford some of these foods; quality costs more. But it shouldn't be at all hard to see the improvements in your dog's health if you've been feeding a low-quality food and make the switch to products of this quality.

■ Tip # 1: Whenever possible, shop at well-trafficked independent pet supply stores. The staff and/or management is usually far more helpful and knowledgeable about products that would be best for your dog at your budget. Next best: chain pet specialty stores.

■ If you wear glasses to read fine print, bring 'em! You are going to study the label of each product in your price range for the following:

- **Ingredients panel** (where the ingredients are listed in descending order of weight in the product). More about this in a minute.
- **Guaranteed analysis** (which lists the *minimum* amounts of protein and fat and the *maximum* amounts of fiber and moisture, and sometimes, other nutrients). You need to know how much protein and fat your dog's food at home contains, and whether he should get more or less. If you've been feeding a low-quality food with,

say, 19% protein and 8% fat, you don't want to switch overnight to a sled-dog fuel with 40% protein and 28% fat.

- **"Best by" date/code** (and sometimes, the date of production, too – it's ideal to have both listed). Look for the freshest food possible, with the "best by" date at least 6 months away.
- **AAFCO statement** (which tells you whether the food has met the requirements of a "complete and balanced" diet, and if so, by which standard: by meeting the required nutrient levels, or by completing an AAFCO feeding trial). For more information about the difference, see "Take it With a Block of Salt," WDJ February 2007.

## HALLMARKS OF QUALITY

Now it's time to scrutinize the ingredients list. The following are desired traits – things you *want to see* on the label.

- ✓ **Lots of animal protein at the top of the ingredients list.** Ingredients are

listed by weight, so you want to see a lot of top quality animal protein at the top of the list; the first ingredient should be a "named" animal protein source (see next bullet).

- ✓ **A named animal protein – chicken, beef, lamb, and so on.** "Meat" is an example of a low-quality protein source of dubious origin. Animal protein "meals" should also be from named species (look for "chicken meal" but avoid "meat meal" or "poultry meal").

- ✓ **When a fresh meat is first on the ingredient list, there should be an animal protein meal in a supporting role** to augment the total animal protein in the diet. Fresh (or frozen) meat contains a lot of water, and water is heavy, so if a fresh meat is first on the list, another source of animal protein should be listed in the top three or so ingredients.

- ✓ **Whole vegetables, fruits, and grains.** Fresh, unprocessed food ingredients contain nutrients in all their natural, complex glory, with their fragile vitamins, enzymes, and antioxidants intact. Don't be alarmed by one or two food "fractions" (a by-product or part of an ingredient, like tomato pomace or rice bran), especially if they are low on the ingredients list. But it's less than ideal if there are several fractions present in the food, and/or they appear high on the ingredients list.

- ✓ **A "best by" date that's at least six months away.** A best by date that's 10 or 11 months away is ideal; it means the food was made very recently. Note: Foods made with synthetic preservatives (BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin) may have a "best by" date that is as much as two years past the date of manufacture.

## AVOID THESE TRAITS

The following are things you *don't* want to see in the ingredients.

- ✗ **Meat by-products or poultry by-products.** Higher-value ingredients are processed and stored more carefully (kept clean and cold) than lower-cost ingredients (such as by-products) by meat processors.

- ✗ **A "generic" fat source** such as "animal fat." This can literally be any fat of animal origin, including used restaurant

grease. "Poultry" fat is not quite as suspect as "animal fat," but "chicken fat" or "duck fat" is better (and traceable).

**X Added sweeteners.** Dogs, like humans, enjoy the taste of sweet foods. Sweeteners effectively persuade many dogs to eat foods comprised mainly of grain fragments (and containing little healthy animal protein).

**X Artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives (i.e., BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin).** The color of the food doesn't matter to your dog. And it should be flavored well enough to be enticing with healthy meats and fats. Natural preservatives, such as tocopherols (vitamin E), vitamin C, and rosemary extract, can be used instead. Note that natural preservatives do not preserve foods as long as artificial preservatives, so owners should always check the "best by" date on the label and look for relatively fresh products.

## GOOD EXAMPLES: WDJ'S "APPROVED DRY FOODS"

We've used the criteria above to assess the product lines of the following companies, representing hundreds of different dry dog foods. All of the products listed below meet our basic selection criteria for top-quality foods.

We've listed the first six ingredients and the minimum percentages of protein and fat from a representative product from each company.

**Please note that the products are NOT rated or ranked; they are listed alphabetically by COMPANY.** So, for example, if you are looking for **Origen**, look under its maker, **CHAMPION PET FOODS**.

## ADJUST AS NECESSARY

You may have been told that it's bad to switch foods, or you may have had a bad experience when your dog ate something different and erupted in gas or diarrhea. With most dogs, the more you change

foods, the more robust and capable their digestion becomes. We suggest switching foods every few months (or even more frequently; we switch our dogs' food with every bag). Switching foods frequently also helps prevent the development of allergies, and helps provide nutritional "balance over time." If your dog ate the same food for months and years, the nutrient levels – particularly the mineral levels – become literally entrenched in your dog's body. This can be particularly harmful if the food you feed contains excessive or insufficient levels of certain vitamins or minerals.

Finally, watch your dog! Let her tell you how the new food works for her. Keep track of what foods you've tried (when the bag is empty, we cut out the ingredients panel and tape it to the calendar). This way, you can continue to make adjustments and improvements in your dog's diet – and, we hope, huge improvements in her physical condition, skin and coat, and overall energy level. 🐾

### ADDICTION FOODS

Kent, WA. (425) 251-0330; addictionfoods.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Addiction** (7 varieties, including 5 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Addiction Foods NZ Limited, Te Puke, New Zealand

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Salmon Bleu contains: Salmon meal, potatoes, chicken fat, smoked salmon, dried blueberries, dried cranberries . . . 24% protein; 13% fat

### AINSWORTH PET NUTRITION

Meadville, PA. (800) 219-2558;  
backtobasicspetfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Back to Basics** (4 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Ainsworth Pet Nutrition's own plants in Meadville, PA; Dumas, AR; Pittsburg, KS

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Back to Basics Turkey contains: Turkey giblets (livers and hearts), turkey meal, turkey, chicken meal, tapioca, pea protein . . . 38% protein; 18% fat

### NEW PRODUCTS FOR THIS LIST APPEAR IN YELLOW BARS

### ANNA MAET PETFOODS

Telford, PA. (888) 723-0367; annamaet.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Annamaet** (8 varieties, including 3 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Ohio Pet Foods, Lisbon, OH

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Annamaet Encore contains: Chicken meal, brown rice, millet, rolled oats, pearled barley, chicken fat . . . 25% protein; 14% fat

### ARTEMIS PET FOODS

Carson, CA. (800) 282-5876;  
artemiscompany.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Fresh Mix** (8 varieties, including 2 puppy); **OsoPure** (1 variety);

**Professional**

**MADE BY** – Diamond Pet Products, Ripon, CA; Pioneer Naturals Pet Food, Hamlin, TX

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Fresh Mix Adult contains: Chicken, chicken meal, turkey, barley, brown rice, oatmeal . . . 23% protein; 14% fat

### BENCH & FIELD PET FOODS

Grand Rapids, MI. (800) 525-4802;  
benchandfield.com

**LINES/TYPES**

**AVAILABLE** – **Holistic Natural Canine**

**MADE BY** – WellPet in Mishawaka, IN

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS**

**OF SAMPLE VARIETY**

– Holistic Natural Canine contains: Chicken meal, brown rice, white rice, oatmeal, chicken fat, pork meal . . . 24% protein; 15% fat



### BLACKWOOD PET FOOD

Lisbon, OH. (888) 843-1738;  
blackwoodpetfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Blackwood** (10 varieties, including 2 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Ohio Pet Foods, Lisbon, OH (parent company of Blackwood Pet Food)

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** –

Blackwood Lamb Meal & Rice contains: Lamb meal, brown rice, millet, ground sorghum, catfish meal, canola oil . . . 24.5% protein; 14% fat

## BLUE BUFFALO COMPANY

Wilton, CT. (800) 919-2833; bluebuffalo.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Blue Basics** (9 varieties with “meat first and limited ingredients”); **Blue Freedom** (4 grain-free varieties); **Blue Life Protection** (19 varieties); **Blue Longevity** (3 “lean for life” varieties); **Blue Wilderness** (8 grain-free varieties)  
**MADE BY** – American Nutrition, Hazle Township, PA; CJ Foods, Bern, KS; ProPet, St. Mary’s, OH and Owatonna, MN; Triple T Foods, Frontenac, KS; Tuffy’s Pet Foods, Perham, MN  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Blue Basics Turkey & Potato contains: Deboned turkey, peas, potatoes, brown rice, turkey meal, flaxseed . . . 22% protein; 12% fat

## BREEDER’S CHOICE PET FOODS

(See Central Garden & Pet)

## BURNS PET HEALTH

Valparaiso, IN. (877) 983-9651;  
burnspethealth.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Burns** (3 varieties)  
**MADE BY** – CJ Foods in Pawnee City, NE  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Burns Holistic Brown Rice & Ocean Fish contains: Brown rice, ocean fish meal, peas, oats, chicken fat, sunflower oil . . . 18.5% protein; 7.5% fat

## CANIDAE NATURAL PET FOOD

San Luis Obispo, CA. (800) 398-1600;  
canidae.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Canidae** (10 varieties, including 4 grain-free and 1 “single grain, protein plus” variety)  
**MADE BY** – Diamond Pet Foods in Gaston, SC; Ripon, CA; and Meta, MO; Canidae’s own new plant, Ethos Pet Nutrition, Brownwood, TX  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Canidae Grain-Free pureSEA contains: Salmon meal, potatoes, potato protein, ocean fish meal, canola oil, peas . . . 40% protein; 20% fat



## CANINE CAVIAR PET FOODS

Riverside, CA. (800) 392-7898;  
caninecaviar.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Canine Caviar** (10 varieties, including 5 grain-free)  
**MADE BY** – Southern Tier Pet Nutrition, Sherburne, NY  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Lamb & Pearl Millet ALS (all life stages) Dinner contains: Dehydrated lamb, pearl millet, lamb fat, yeast culture, alfalfa, calcium proteinate . . . 25% protein; 14% fat

## CARNA4 INC.

Toronto, Ontario. (855) 422-7624; carna4.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Carna4**  
**MADE BY** – Bio Biscuit, Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Carna4 contains: Chicken, chicken liver, eggs, organic sprouted barley seeds, salmon, vegetables (peas, sweet potatoes, carrots, spinach, garlic) . . . 24% protein; 15% fat

## CASTOR & POLLUX PET WORKS

(Now owned by Merrick Pet Care) Amarillo, TX. (800) 875-7518; castorpolluxpet.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Castor & Pollux Organix** (6 varieties, including 2 grain-free); **Castor & Pollux Ultramix** (6 varieties, including 1 grain-free)  
**MADE BY** – Merrick’s own plant in Hereford, TX  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Organix Adult Grain-Free contains: Organic chicken, poultry meal, organic tapioca, organic peas, organic soybean meal, organic potato . . . 30% protein; 12% fat

## CENTRAL GARDEN & PET

Walnut Creek, CA. (888) 500-6286; central.com  
apdselectchoice.com, avodermnatural.com,  
goactivedog.com, pinnaclepet.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Active Care** (2 varieties); **Advanced Pet Diets Select Choice** (6 varieties); **AvoDerm Natural** (9 varieties, 2 grain-free); **AvoDerm Natural Oven-Baked** (3 varieties); **AvoDerm Revolving Menu** (3 varieties); **Pinnacle Holistic** (6 varieties, 3 grain-free)  
**MADE BY** – Central Garden’s own plant in Irwindale, CA  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Avoderm Triple Protein contains: Chicken meal, brown rice, lamb meal, turkey meal, white rice, oatmeal . . . 26% protein; 13% fat

## CHAMPION PETFOODS

Morinville, Alberta. (877) 939-0006;  
championpetfoods.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Acana** (15 varieties, including 4 grain-free); **Orijen** (6 varieties, all grain-free)  
**MADE BY** – Champion’s own plant in Morinville, Alberta, Canada  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Orijen 6 Fish contains: Boneless salmon, salmon meal, herring meal, boneless herring, boneless walleye, russet potato . . . 38% protein; 18% fat

## DIAMOND PET PRODUCTS

Meta, MO. (800) 442-0402;  
chickensoupforthepetloverssoul.com;  
premiumedgepetfood.com;  
professionalpetfood.com;  
tasteofthewildpetfood.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover’s Soul** (7 varieties); **Premium Edge** (8 varieties); **Professional Pet Food** (7 varieties); **Taste of the Wild** (7 varieties, all grain-free).  
**MADE BY** – Diamond’s own manufacturing facilities in Gaston, SC; Lathrop, CA; Ripon, CA; and Meta, MO  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Taste of the Wild Sierra Mountain Canine contains: Lamb, lamb meal, potatoes, peas, canola oil, pea protein . . . 25% protein; 15% fat

## DOGSWELL

Los Angeles, CA. (888) 559-8833;  
dogswell.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Happy Hips** (1 variety); **Nutrisca** (3 grain-free, potato-free varieties); **Vitality** (1 variety).  
**MADE BY** – Tuffy’s Pet Foods, Perham, MN  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Happy Hips Chicken & Oats contains: Chicken, chicken meal, oats, barley, brown rice, natural flavor . . . 24% protein; 12% fat

## DR. GARY’S BEST BREED

Findlay, OH. (800) 500-5999; bestbreed.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Best Breed** (12 varieties, including 6 breed-specific)  
**MADE BY** – Ohio Pet Foods, Lisbon, OH  
**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Best Breed Catfish With Vegetables & Herbs contains: Catfish meal, pearled barley, brown rice, canola oil, oatmeal, tomato pomace . . . 23% protein; 13% fat





## DR. TIM'S PET FOOD COMPANY

Lshpeming, MI. (906) 249-8486; drtims.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Dr. Tim's** (4 varieties, including 1 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Ohio Pet Foods, Lisbon, OH

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Dr. Tim's Kinesis contains: Chicken meal, brown rice flour, oat flour, pearled barley, chicken fat, dried beet pulp . . . 26% protein; 16% fat

## DRS. FOSTER & SMITH

Rhineland, WI. (800) 562-7169;  
 drsfostersmith.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Drs. Foster & Smith Dog Food** (5 varieties).

**MADE BY** – CJ Foods, Pawnee City, NE

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Drs. Foster & Smith Lamb & Brown Rice contains: Lamb, lamb meal, brown rice, barley, brewers rice, oat groats . . . 21% protein; 11% fat

## EVANGER'S DOG & CAT FOOD CO.

Wheeling, IL. (800) 288-6796;  
 evangersdogfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Evanger's** (5 varieties, 2 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Mid America Pet Foods, Mt. Pleasant, TX

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Pheasant & Brown Rice contains: Pheasant, duck meal, brown rice, salmon meal, pearled barley, oatmeal . . . 24% protein; 14% fat

## FIRSTMATE PET FOODS

North Vancouver, British Columbia. (604) 985-3032; firstmate.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **FirstMate Classic** (4 varieties); **FirstMate Grain-Free** (7 varieties); **Skoki** (1 variety)

**MADE BY** – FirstMate's own plant in Chilliwack, BC, Canada

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – FirstMate's Grain-Free Chicken & Blueberries contains: Potato, chicken meal, chicken fat, whole blueberries, (vitamin/mineral ingredients) . . . 25% protein; 14% fat

## FROMM FAMILY FOODS

Mequon, WI. (262) 242-2200;  
 frommfamily.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Fromm Four-Star Canine Entrees** (9 varieties, including 4 grain-free); **Gold Nutritionals** (7 varieties); **Fromm Classics** (2 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Fromm's own plants in Columbus, WI and Mequon, WI

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Four Star Duck & Sweet Potato contains: Duck, duck meal, pearled barley, sweet potatoes, brown rice, oatmeal . . . 24% protein; 15% fat

## GRANDMA MAE'S

New York, NY. (888) 653-8021;  
 grandmamaes.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Grandma Mae's Country Naturals** (5 varieties, including 1 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Ohio Pet Foods, Lisbon, OH; Southern Tier Pet Nutrition, Sherburne, NY

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Grandma Mae's Country Naturals Adult contains: Chicken, chicken meal, brown rice, oats, barley, rice . . . 24% protein; 14% fat

## HILL'S PET NUTRITION, INC.

Topeka, KS. (800) 445-5777; hillspet.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Science Diet Ideal Balance** (4 varieties, including 1 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Hill's Pet Nutrition's own plants in Emporia, KS; Richmond, IN; and Bowling Green, KY

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Science Diet Ideal Balance Adult chicken & Brown Rice contains: Chicken, brown rice, wheat, cracked pearled barley, soybean meal, chicken meal . . . 24.8% protein; 16.1% fat

## HI-TEK RATIONS

Dublin, GA. (800) 284-4835;  
 www.hitekration.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Hi-Tek Naturals** (6 varieties, including 3 grain-free); **Life 4K9** (2 varieties); **Perfectly Natural Dog** (3 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Hi-Tek's own plant in Dublin, GA

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Perfectly Natural Dog Adult contains: Chicken meal, brown rice, white rice, barley, chicken fat, white fish . . . 26% protein; 16% fat

## HORIZON PET NUTRITION

Rosthern, Saskatchewan. (403) 279-5874;  
 horizonpetfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Amicus** (3 grain-free varieties); **Horizon Complete** (5 varieties); **Horizon Legacy** (3 varieties); and **Pulsar** (2 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Horizon's own plant in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, Canada.

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Horizon Legacy Adult contains: Chicken, chicken meal, pea, pea starch, turkey meal, chicken fat . . . 34% protein; 15% fat

## KENT NUTRITION GROUP

Muscatine, IA. (877) 367-9225;  
 bynaturepetfoods.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **By Nature** (9 varieties, including 1 grain-free and 1 organic)

**MADE BY** – Kent Nutrition Group's own plant in Arcade, NY; By Nature Organics is made at CJ Foods, Pawnee City, NE

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – By Nature Pork & Sweet Potato contains: Pork meal, ground barley, canola oil, sweet potatoes, flaxseed meal, oatmeal . . . 24% protein; 14% fat

## LINCOLN BIOTECH

Beamsville, Ontario. (800) 253-8128;  
 lincolnbitech.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Zinpro**

**MADE BY** – Spector Feed Services, Moorfield, Ontario, Canada

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Zinpro contains: Menhaden fish meal, brown rice, oatmeal, ground barley, herring meal, oat flour . . . 22% protein; 12% fat

## LOTUS NATURAL FOOD

Torrance, CA. (888) 995-6887;  
 lotuspetfoods.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Lotus** (5 varieties, including 1 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Bio Biscuit, St Hyacinthe, Quebec, Canada

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Lotus Lamb contains: Lamb, lamb meal, rye, pollack, brown rice, barley . . . 24% protein; 12% fat; 4.5% fiber; 10% moisture.

## MERRICK PET CARE

Amarillo, TX. (800) 664-7387;  
merrickpetcare.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Before Grain** (3 grain-free varieties); **Merrick 5-Star** (10 varieties, including 4 grain-free); **Whole Earth Farms** (3 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Merrick Pet Care's own plant in Hereford, TX

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Merrick's Cowboy Cookout contains: Beef, pork meal, ground rice, oatmeal, pearled barley, salmon meal . . . 24% protein; 14% fat

## MIDWESTERN PET FOODS, INC.

Evansville, IN; (800) 752-2319;  
earthbornholisticpetfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Earthborn Holistic** (8 varieties, including 1 puppy and 4 grain-free).

**MADE BY** – Midwestern's own plant in Monmouth, IL

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Earthborn Primitive Natural contains: Turkey meal, chicken meal, whitefish meal, potatoes, chicken fat, dried egg product . . . 38% protein; 20% fat

## MULLIGAN STEW PET FOOD

Jackson, WY. (888) 364-7839;  
mulliganstewpetfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Mulligan Stew** (3 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Mountain Country Foods, Okeene, OK

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Mulligan Stew Lamb contains: Lamb, brown rice, oats, lamb meal, lamb liver, dehydrated alfalfa meal . . . 26% protein; 10% fat

## NATURA PET PRODUCTS

(a division of Procter & Gamble Pet Care)  
Fremont, NE; (800) 532-7261; naturapet.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** –

**California Natural** (14 varieties, including 5 grain-free); **Evo** (7 grain-free varieties); **HealthWise** (5 varieties); **Innova** (13 varieties, including 3 grain-free); **Karma** (1 organic variety)

**MADE BY** – Natura's own plant in Fremont, NE

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Innova Prime Grain-Free Beef & Lamb contains: Beef, lamb meal, green lentils, red lentils, sunflower oil, flaxseed . . . 36% protein; 16% fat

## NATURE'S SELECT CORP.

Anaheim, CA. (888) 814-7387;  
naturalpetfooddelivery.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Nature's Select** (8 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Mid America Pet Foods Mt. Pleasant, TX

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Nature's Select Classic contains: Chicken meal, brown rice, oatmeal, pearled millet, chicken fat, lamb meal . . . 24% protein; 12% fat

## NATURAL BALANCE

Pacoima, CA. (800) 829-4493;  
naturalbalanceinc.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Limited Ingredient Diets** (13 varieties); **Alpha Dog Formulas** (3 grain-free varieties); **Organic** (1 variety); **Ultra Premium** (5 varieties, incl. 1 vegetarian).

**MADE BY** – American Nutrition Inc., Ogden, UT; CJ Foods, Bern, KS; and Diamond Pet Foods in Gaston, SC; Ripon, CA; Vitaline Pet Products, Hazel Township, PA

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Natural Balance Organic contains: Organic chicken, organic brown rice, chicken meal, organic oats, organic millet, organic barley . . . 22% protein; 13% fat

## NATURE'S VARIETY

Lincoln, NE. (888) 519-7387;  
naturesvariety.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Instinct** (8 grain-free varieties); **Prairie** (7 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Pied Piper Mills in Hamlin, TX

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Prairie Beef & Barley contains: Beef meal, barley, brown rice, oatmeal, chicken fat, ground flaxseed . . . 26% protein; 14% fat

## NUTRO ULTRA

Franklin, TN. (800) 833-5330; ultraholistic.com  
**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Ultra Holistic** (11 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Nutro's own plants in Victorville, CA and Lebanon, TN

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Ultra Adult contains: Chicken, chicken meal, brown rice, rice, rice bran, chicken fat . . . 25% protein; 14% fat

## PARTY ANIMAL

West Hollywood, CA. (855) 727-8926;  
partyanimalpetfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Party Animal**

**MADE BY** – Tuffy's Pet Foods in Perham, MN

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Party Animal contains: Organic chicken, chicken meal, organic brown rice, organic oats, organic barley, natural turkey and chicken flavor . . . 23% protein; 14% fat

## PERFECT HEALTH DIET PRODUCTS

(See Viand)

## PERFORMANCE PET PRODUCTS

Mitchell, SD.  
(866) 868-0874;  
springnaturals.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Spring Naturals** (13 varieties, including 5 grain-free and 1 organic)

**MADE BY** – CJ Foods, Bern, KS and Pawnee City, NE

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Spring Naturals Organic

Chicken Dinner contains:

Organic chicken, organic peas, organic chickpeas, organic dried eggs, organic quinoa, organic chicken fat . . . 23% protein; 15% fat



## PET CHEF EXPRESS

New Westminster, British Columbia.  
(604) 916-2433; petchefexpress.ca

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Pet Chef Express**

**MADE BY** – Nutreco, St. Mary's, Ontario

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Pet Chef Express contains: Salmon meal, oats, millet, hullless barley, canola oil, salmon oil . . . 25% protein; 10% fat

## PETCUREAN PET NUTRITION

Chilliwack, British Columbia. (866) 864-6112;  
petcurean.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Go!** (6 varieties, including 3 grain-free); **Now Fresh** (7 varieties, all grain-free); **Summit Holistics** (6 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Elmira Pet Products, Elmira, Ontario

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Go!

Refresh + Renew Chicken contains: Chicken meal, deboned chicken, brown rice, white rice, oatmeal, sunflower oil . . . 24% protein; 14% fat

## PETGUARD

Green Cove Springs, FL. (800) 874-3221;  
petguard.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **PetGuard LifeSpan**,  
**PetGuard Organics LifePath**, **PetGuard**  
**Organics Vegetarian**

**MADE BY** – CJ Foods, Bern, KS

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** –

PetGuard LifeSpan contains: Chicken, chicken meal, brown rice, oatmeal, chicken fat, eggs . . . 24% protein; 15% fat

## PET VALU

Markham, Ontario. (800) 738-8258;  
performatrinultra.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Permatrin Ultra** (6 varieties, 1 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Elmira Pet Products, Elmira, Ontario

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** –

Permatrin Ultra Chicken & Brown Rice formula contains: Chicken, chicken meal, brown rice, oatmeal, rice, pearled barley . . . 22% protein; 12% fat

## PRECISE PET PRODUCTS

Nacogdoches, TX. (888) 477-3247;  
precisepet.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Precise Holistic Complete** (9 varieties, 2 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Texas Farm Products' own plant in Nacogdoches, TX

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Precise Holistic Complete Wild at Heart River contains: Salmon meal, brown rice, potato, oatmeal, chicken fat, rice bran . . . 24% protein; 15% fat

## PYRAMID PET PRODUCTS

Las Vegas, NV. (888) 408-0895;  
pyramidpet.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Tuscan Natural Simply Pure** (2 varieties with limited ingredients);

**Tuscan Natural Harvest** (3 varieties); **Tuscan Natural Carne** (2 grain-free varieties).

**MADE BY** – CJ Foods, Bern, KS

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Tuscan Natural Simply Pure Chicken contains: chicken meal, brown rice, rice, chicken fat, olive oil, flaxseed . . . 21% protein; 11% fat

## PROCTER & GAMBLE PET CARE

Cincinnati, OH. (888) 385-2682;  
eukanuba.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Eukanuba Naturally Wild** (6 varieties); **Eukanuba Pure Formulas** (3 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Eukanuba's own plants in Aurora, NE; Leipsic, OH; Henderson, NC

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** –

Eukanuba Naturally Wild New Zealand Venison & Potato contains: Venison, potato, sorghum, brewers rice, barley, chicken meal . . . 23% protein; 14% fat

## SMARTPAK CANINE

Plymouth, MA. (800) 461-8898; smartpak.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **LiveSmart** (5 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Ohio Pet Food, Lisbon, OH

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** –

LiveSmart Lamb & Brown Rice Adult contains: Lamb, lamb meal, brown rice, barley, oats, dried beet pulp . . . 21% protein; 11% fat

## THREE DOG BAKERY

Kansas City, MO. (800) 487-3287;  
threedog.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Bake to Nature** (4 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Hampshire Pet Products, Joplin, MO

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Bake to Nature Chicken contains: Chicken, chicken meal, oatmeal, barley, rice, rice bran . . . 22% protein; 10% fat

## SOLID GOLD HEALTH PRODUCTS

El Cajon, CA. (800) 364-4863;  
solidgoldhealth.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Solid Gold** (9 varieties, including 2 grain-free).

**MADE BY** – Crosswinds Industries, Sabetha, KS; and Diamond Pet Products, Meta, MO

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Sun

Dancer Grain- and Gluten-Free contains: Chicken, chicken meal, tapioca, peas, whitefish meal, quinoa . . . 30% protein; 14% fat

## TUFFY'S PET FOODS

Perham, MN; (800) 525-9155;  
nutrisourcedogfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Natural Planet Organics** (1 variety); **NutriSource** (16 varieties, including 6 grain-free); **PureVita** (6 varieties, 3 grain-free)

**MADE BY** – Tuffy's own plant in Perham, MN

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Natural Planet Organics contains: Organic chicken,

chicken meal, organic brown rice, organic oats, organic barley, natural flavors . . . 23% protein; 14% fat

## VERUS PET FOODS

Abingdon, MD. (888) 828-3787;  
veruspetfoods.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **VeRus** (5 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Ohio Pet Foods, Lisbon, OH

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – VerUS Advanced Opticoat Diet Menhaden Fish Meal & Potato contains: Menhaden fish meal, potato, barley, oats, beet pulp, Menhaden fish oil . . . 22% protein; 11% fat

## VETS CHOICE

Deer Park, NY; (800) 992-9738; vetschoice.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Vets Choice Health Extension** (5 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Southern Tier Pet Foods, Sherburne, NY

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Vets Choice Health Extension Original contains: Organic chicken, chicken meal, brown rice, oatmeal, chicken fat, lamb meal . . . 24% protein; 18% fat

## VIAND

(formerly known as PHD)  
Elmsford, NY. (800) 743-1502; viandpet.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Viand** (2 varieties)

**MADE BY** – Southern Tier Pet Nutrition, Sherburne, NY

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Viand Canine Growth & Maintenance contains: Lamb meal, chicken meal, oat groats, whole brown rice, chicken fat, flaxseed meal . . . 26% protein; 16% fat

## WELLPET

Tewksbury, MA. (800) 225-0904;  
holisticselect.com; wellnesspetfood.com

**LINES/TYPES AVAILABLE** – **Holistic Select** (12 varieties, including 1 grain-free); **Core** (5 grain-free varieties); **Simple Food Solutions** (4 varieties, including 2 grain-free); **Complete Health Super5Mix** (11 varieties).

**MADE BY** – WellPet's own plant, Mishawaka, IN; Hagen Pet Foods, Waverly, NY; and Vita-line Products, Inc., Hazleton, PA

**1ST SIX INGREDIENTS OF SAMPLE VARIETY** – Holistic Select Radiant Adult Health Chicken Meal & Rice contains: Chicken meal, brown rice, white rice, oatmeal, chicken fat, pork meal . . . 24% protein; 15% fat

# Altered Consciousness

*The growing debate over when – or even if – it is always best to spay or neuter.*

BY DENISE FLAIM

**W**hen we talk about dogs, invariably we talk about dog people. The human desire to group things that interest us and build commonality among kindred spirits is hardwired— as is our tendency to segregate and highlight differences. As a result, dog people may identify as belonging to as many different canine communities as there are breeds. And within those “tribes,” we have mores, and values, and politics – and not all of them are compatible.

I belong to a tribe that is somewhat beleaguered these days: I breed and show purebred dogs. I screen my homes carefully. I have long legal contracts that require any dog of my breeding to be returned to me if he or she is no longer wanted, regardless of reason or age or health condition. And, of course,

I require that all puppies that I sell as companions be spayed and neutered.

But in recent years, my attitude on that last score has begun to change, in large part due to new information about the potential for adverse effects of spay and neuter surgeries. My contracts still require those lovely and loved compan-

ions to be altered, and in more than a decade I have never had any reproduce (at least as far as I know!). But the details regarding when I want spay/neuter surgery done on my puppies have changed, and likely will continue to evolve.

Broaching the subject of delayed spay/neuter – and in the case of some males, perhaps not neutering at all – is the doggie equivalent of discussing Obama versus Romney at the Christmas dinner table, which gives me pause, because I let that happen last month, with predictably disastrous results. It has the potential of making people angry, threatened, bewildered, regretful – maybe even a combination of all those. That’s not my intent.

What I want to do, though, is open up dialogue on a subject that for a long time has been presented as black and white.

While no one questions the importance of spay/neuter as a tool to stem animal overpopulation, the questions on the table are: Does one size fit all? Should committed, responsible people review the facts and scientific

**“Pediatric” spay surgery helps shelters adopt puppies quickly; this 12-week-old pup was spayed three days ago and is fully recovered and ready for adoption. But some experts worry that early spay surgery can cause health problems years down the road.**



literature to make an individualized decision for their particular dog? Is it *always* necessary to remove testes in a male dog and ovaries in a female dog in order to render them sterile, or are there other options? What are the real risks of keeping a dog intact for some period of time, balanced against a growing body of evidence showing that early spay/neuter might be implicated in a number of orthopedic, oncological, and even behavioral problems?

So many questions, and unfortunately, no clear-cut answers.

## HISTORY LESSON

The American embrace of spay/neuter evolved in concert with human population trends. The post-World War II “baby boom” and economic expansion saw families increasingly bringing dogs and cats into their households – and the animals reproduced even more prolifically than the families themselves.

As cities (and later, rural communities) began to employ and then depend on animal shelters to deal with stray and unwanted pets, the population of animals concentrated in those facilities, leading to routine killing of excess dogs and cats. Spay/neuter was embraced enthusiastically by shelter workers and rescue volunteers alike as an effective tool for helping control the population of unwanted animals and reducing euthanasia. By the 1970s, the veterinary culture had also embraced surgical sterilization for population control.

This is in contrast to attitudes elsewhere in the world, particularly in many parts of Europe, where unaltered dogs are common. In Norway, it is illegal to spay or neuter a dog without a valid medical reason. The rationale is that it is morally wrong to surgically alter a dog for human whim or convenience, which puts spay/neuter on a par with ear cropping and tail docking.

Over the decades, as animal sheltering has increased in visibility and animal rescue has become more popular, spay/neuter has hardened into an almost militant social policy. Today, it’s widely a cultural norm for dogs to lack any physical signs of sexual maturation. I’ve had puppy buyers balk at the idea of a female’s silhouette being made “unsightly” by visible nipples, and I had a co-worker who almost threw up at the idea of testicles on a male dog. “Rubbing on my couch – ugh!” she proclaimed.

**A veterinarian examines a patient who is in the midst of treatment for mammary gland (breast) cancer. Spaying female dogs before their first heat prevents virtually all cases of this cancer.**

And, oftentimes, what we don’t know, we fear. “The average person has never seen a dog in heat, never seen dogs mating, never watched a female give birth, never watched her raise her puppies,” one veterinarian reminded me.

## THE MEDICAL PICTURE

Population control – specifically, as a tool to reduce the mass killing in our nation’s animal shelters – has always been the overarching goal of spay/neuter campaigns. Other benefits of sterilization surgery have been enthusiastically promoted by veterinarians and the shelter community alike.

For example, spaying prevents pyometra, which affects a full quarter of all intact females by age 10. And in males, neutering removes the possibility of testicular cancer as well as reduces the risk of prostate enlargement and infection later in life. Neutering is also believed to reduce hormone-related behaviors such as leg lifting, humping, and male-on-male aggression.

The universal recommendation that dogs and cats of both genders undergo sterilization surgery at six months of age came from the handy benchmark of the average age that most females come into heat. Those involved in animal sheltering have been the most vocal proponents of even earlier sterilization, now commonly referred to as *pediatric* spay/neuter. Shelter medicine experts point out that pediatric spay/neuter surgical procedures are easier and faster; and with shorter surgery and anesthesia times, the incidence of postoperative complications is low, and recovery very quick.

Prior to widespread acceptance of this practice, shelters often allowed adoption of intact pets, and held a deposit from pet adopters, returning the money only when the owner showed proof that the pet had been sterilized. However, some owners failed to comply, giving up the deposits, and others complied only after the pet had an accidental litter. Pediatric surgery closed this loophole; indisputably, the biggest benefit of pediatric spay/neuter is populational. With this tool, shelters can prevent every animal leaving the shelter from ever reproducing.



Shelter workers and veterinarians who offer pediatric spay/neuter are understandably fans of the practice, citing those quick recovery times for young animals. The biggest long-term health benefit of pediatric sterilization, however, is usually identified as the prevention of mammary cancer in females.

## DOUBT DEVELOPS

As with a number of other canine healthcare practices, in recent years, the conventions of spay/neuter surgery are being questioned by some canine health experts and dogs owners – particularly those with a “holistic dog” mind set, many of whom are accustomed to questioning the status quo.

Most of these owners also research what is in their dogs’ food and their veterinarians’ vaccine syringes; they want to do what’s healthiest, what’s most natural, for their dogs, even if it challenges – or upends – the conventional wisdom. But this topic could be the third rail of dogdom: the assumption that we should automatically and unquestionably spay and neuter all our companion dogs.

Some of these owners, influenced by the opinions of a few canine health experts, are beginning to question the validity of many long-held beliefs about the medical and behavioral benefits of spay/neuter. A growing number (particularly those in performance eventing, who are closely attuned to changes and weaknesses in their dogs’ bodies) are contemplating delayed spay/neuter, and – increasingly, in the



**A growing number of owners (particularly those in performance eventing, who are closely attuned to changes and weaknesses in their dogs' bodies) now delay spay/neuter surgery for their dogs.**

of age; significantly higher prevalence of cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) injury; heightened risk of urinary incontinence in females that are spayed early, as well as some cases in males; greater likelihood of hypothyroidism in spayed and neutered dogs; higher incidence of infectious diseases in dogs spayed and neutered at 24 weeks or less; higher incidence of adverse reactions to vaccines in altered dogs; and increased risk of prostate cancer in neutered males.

It's a long list, and it grows as Dr. Zink adds other studies that support the view that on balance, early spay/neuter is "not more healthy" than waiting until a dog is sexually mature before he or she is altered.

Health is not the only area where Dr. Zink questions the benefits of early spay/neuter; she is currently co-authoring a study that analyzes how spay/neuter affected 26 different behavioral components in 15,000 dogs. "The fact of the matter is, spay or neuter doesn't improve their behavior in any way," she says. "[Intact dogs] are not more aggressive to dogs or strangers."

To say Dr. Zink's position on the importance of avoiding early spay/neuter is controversial is perhaps an understatement; it does, after all, contradict the position held by most general-practice veterinarians. Critiques and rebuttals to each of her bullet points are all over the Internet; one person who read an early draft of this article called her a "zealot." And for every study she cites, a Google search will undoubtedly turn up another that says the opposite.

But to me, that just reinforces the importance of keeping an open mind: With so many differing viewpoints, how do we know who is right? "It doesn't matter if we all don't do the 'right' thing," goes one of my favorite lines about following the lemmings when you breed dogs. "It just matters that we don't all do the *same* thing." I think that applies to early spay/neuter, too.

### **MY PERSONAL APPROACH**

When I changed my attitudes about annual vaccination and about feeding raw versus kibble, it was easy to get caught

up in the battle of facts and statistics that both sides drummed up. In the end, the tool I used to make my decisions about "what is best" for my dogs was common sense. I stepped back and asked: Does it make sense to feed a dog a diet of processed foods whose protein sources are not fit for human consumption? Does it make sense to overload a dog's immune system with yearly vaccines for some diseases that are not prevalent or ultimately life-threatening?

And for early spay/neuter, I asked myself: Does it make sense to think that you can remove a puppy's major reproductive organs – and all the hormones that go with it – and not expect there to be some biological ramifications? For me, what has been missing from the spay/neuter discussion has been the question of holism, which can't be answered by citing *JAVMA* papers or orchestrating double-blind studies.

Myrna Milani, DVM, of TippingPoint Animal Behavior Consulting Services in Charlestown, New Hampshire, thinks back to the zeal with which she approached spay/neuter during the 1970s. "I could have won the Golden Gonad Award – there wasn't a pair of testicles or ovaries that was safe from me," she says. "Then I woke up one day and thought, 'My God, what have I done?' As a woman who went through puberty, who menstruated, who had sex, who had children, who was going through menopause, how in the world could I have been so naïve as to say that all ovaries did was affect reproduction? That they did not affect the entire body?"

"Dogs are like us: We have testosterone and estrogen receptors all over our bodies – they are in our brains, lungs, bones . . . They affect learning, they affect memory," Dr. Milani says. If we remove the organs that produce most of the body's testosterone and estrogen before those hormones have an opportunity to exert their influence on the dog, we're going to have to deal with the consequences down the road, she warns.

### **RISKS AND SOLUTIONS: LADIES FIRST**

The two biggest health benefits cited for spaying females before their first heat is reduced risk of mammary-cancer rates and the elimination of pyometra. Personally, unless a female is being used for breeding, I can't find a justification for keeping her unspayed indefinitely. For

case of males – even dispensing with it altogether.

One of the most vocal opponents to today's spay/neuter conventions is Chris Zink, DVM, PhD, DACVP, DACVSMR, of Ellicott City, Maryland. Dr. Zink's interest in the subject was promoted by her work with performance dogs, who compete in high-impact, physically demanding sports like agility. Many, if not most, of these dogs are sterilized.

In 2005, Dr. Zink first published an article, "Early Spay-Neuter Considerations for the Canine Athlete," which lists studies that highlight the risks of early spay/neuter. One orthopedic issue she mentions (and one that I have seen time and again) is the elongated "look" that results from prematurely shutting off the sex hormones that govern the closing of the growth plates. These longer, lighter limbs, and narrow chests and skulls aren't just a cosmetic concern: A 2002 study published in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention* showed that this lengthening of the long bones creates a significantly higher risk of osteosarcoma, or bone cancer, in dogs altered at younger than one year.

The list of problems that Dr. Zink associates with early spay/neuter continues: greater risk of hemangiosarcoma, mast cell cancer, lymphoma, and bladder cancer; higher incidence of hip dysplasia in dogs spayed or neutered at six months

me, the question is not whether to spay, but when to.

In terms of my own puppy buyers, I have encouraged them to allow their female puppies to go through one heat cycle before spaying – provided they know what they are getting into (see “Keeping Intact Dogs: Can You Really Do All This?” below) and can house a female pup securely for that three-week period. Though there are no studies to confirm this, anecdotal evidence suggests that allowing the body to go through a

heat allows the genitalia to mature normally, avoiding or resolving inverted vulvas that can lead to incontinence. It also permits the maturation of estrogen receptors, which might also play a role in incontinence, a known risk of spay surgery, and beyond.

A study published in the *Journal of the National Institutes of Cancer* in 1969, “Factors Influencing Canine Mammary Cancer Development and Post-Surgical Survival Rates,” is the most commonly cited reference regarding the correlation

between spaying and mammary cancer in dogs. It says that females spayed before their first heat have an almost zero chance of developing mammary cancer; after the first heat, that risk rises to 8 percent, and 26 percent after the second heat. Beyond that point, the study says, the protective aspect of spaying (as regards mammary cancer) is negligible.

Though that study is almost universally quoted when supporting early spay, it’s also been criticized as poorly designed. Even so, I always thought that

## KEEPING INTACT DOGS: CAN YOU REALLY DO ALL THIS?

If you decide to delay spaying or neutering your dog, for whatever length of time or whatever reason, here is something else to consider: Some people just may not be cut out to deal with an intact male or female dog in their household. Here are some caveats and considerations:

✓ Female dogs do not have monthly menstrual periods like humans, as some people mistakenly believe; they come into “heat,” or “season,” once or twice a year. (Though both biological processes involve bleeding, it’s inaccurate to compare a woman’s monthly cycle, which is an infertile time, to the heat in the female dog, which is quite the opposite.) Some dogs cycle every six months; more primitive breeds, such as Basenjis or Tibetan Mastiffs, come into heat only once a year.

✓ Female dogs can get pregnant only during their heat – the three to four days in their cycle when their unfertilized eggs ripen. Some females will show physical signs of readiness – their discharge will lighten in color, and they will “flag,” or lift their tail up and to the side. Others will show no behavioral changes; still others will “stand” and accept a suitor at any time in their cycle, even days before or after they are fertile. If you cannot be absolutely certain of identifying the signs of heat in your female, and securing her during this time, spay her. Intact males are frighteningly persistent in reaching the object of their desires; they will hurl themselves through glass windows, and might even attempt (and succeed) at breeding a female through the wires of a crate.

✓ You cannot leave a female in heat unattended for one moment outside, not even in a fenced yard. Whether or not she is in that narrow window of time when she can get pregnant, she might attract a male, and they might breed anyway. Though dogs have been mating for millennia, it is not a process that is without risk of physical harm to one or both dogs.

✓ If there are stray dogs where you live, walking a female in heat is asking for trouble. Ideally, have a secure, fenced area where your female can do her business, always supervised by you. If you must take her out in public to walk her, carry an umbrella that you can open to ward off unwelcome males, but know that you still might not be able to keep them apart.

✓ A heat cycle lasts about three weeks, but the female will neither bleed heavily nor bleed every day. Nonetheless, to protect your carpets and furniture, it is smart to invest in “bitch’s britches,” which are dog-proportioned panties that can be fitted with a disposable sanitary napkin.

✓ If you have an unneutered male in your household, and you want to let your female go through one or more heat cycles before spaying her, the smartest and safest thing is to remove one of them for the duration of the female’s heat. It is difficult to describe the stress, restlessness, and sheer loss of sanity that a male dog can exhibit in the face of a female in standing season. It will be close to unbearable for you, to say nothing of him. Plan a vacation for one of them, ideally the male. (And if you plan to use a boarding kennel, females in heat will be too big a disruption there in the event other unneutered males are there, too.)

✓ Once your female has started her heat, don’t change course. Many veterinarians are reluctant to spay females in the middle of estrus; the uterus, preparing for pregnancy, is very vascular, and the risk of internal bleeding is higher. Instead, schedule spay surgery at a hormonally “quiet” time, ideally midway between heats. Depending on the individual dog, unneutered males can be trained through consistency and positive reinforcement not to urine-mark in the house. Ditto for discouraging “humping.” Do not tolerate these behaviors at any time.

✓ As with unspayed females, unneutered males must be under your control and supervision at *all* times. It is the height of irresponsibility to allow them to wander. Unlike females, unneutered males are fertile all the time, and they can create a neighborhood population explosion in no time at all.

✓ Remember that in the larger world outside your door, intact dogs are the minority. By choosing to have an unneutered male (in particular, because he is visually easy to identify), you restrict your options and access to different environments, including dog runs and doggie day care. You will likely be required to explain and defend your decision not to neuter your dog; be prepared, be polite, and have a very thick skin.

an 8 percent increased risk of mammary cancer was a chance was worth taking, if allowing the dog to mature sexually helped prevent other issues such as other cancers and various orthopedic concerns. Mammary cancer isn't the only thing female dogs can die from; it is one concern among many.

Since our experience colors things, my attitude also likely has to do with the fact that I have not had much experience with mammary cancer in my intact females or those of fellow breeders. That is not to say that it won't happen – and as soon as you say, “Not me!” it usually does – but for the moment, cancers like lymphoma and hemangiosarcoma are anecdotally more prevalent, even among the retired breeding bitches I know.

Both Dr. Zink and Dr. Milani think that in the case of females, spaying after the second heat (which is likely to be more regular and normal than the first heat) is ideal. Milani points to a 1991 study in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* that showed that the risk of mammary cancer was significantly reduced in females who were spayed at or before 2½ years old, and who had been thin at nine to 12 months of age.

When it comes time to do the spay surgery at whatever age, Dr. Zink advocates removing just the uterus and leaving the ovaries intact. In this way, there is no risk of pyometra, the female will not go into heat and be attractive to males, she cannot get pregnant – and she retains her hormone-producing ovaries. She cautions, however, that the veterinarian performing the surgery needs to be sure that the entire uterus is removed, because dogs can develop stump pyometras, which are just as life-threatening.

While performing a tubal ligation, or “tube tying,” is certainly an option, it is somewhat impractical, as removal of the uterus at a later date still would be necessary to eliminate the risk of pyometra.

What are the proven risks or benefits of removing a dog's uterus but leaving the ovaries intact? No one can say for sure; it simply has not been done enough. Would those hormone-producing ovaries continue to raise the risk for mammary cancer? Or, conversely, being unable to “communicate” with the uterus that they know is supposed to be there, would the ovaries eventually stop working, as they do with women after hysterectomies? Again, no one knows for sure.

## ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS: MALES

In many respects, delaying neutering in males is a little easier: The health ramifications, while still present, are not as dire as for females.

Testicular cancer is still a concern, but is easily detectable, Dr. Zink says. “You just watch for it by examining the testicles regularly. If you see one testicle is larger, it usually means there's a tumor there, but it is almost always benign. However, at that point you would have the testicles removed.”

A bigger problem, in my experience, is prostatitis in intact males, especially older ones who are sexually stimulated by intact females in the household. If a prostate infection develops, and leads to an abscess, it can be difficult to diagnose. I almost lost an unneutered older male to an abscess that had thankfully not yet gone into sepsis –but I have friends with dogs who were not as lucky.

Because of health considerations, my puppy contracts currently ask that male puppies not be neutered before 12 months, and ideally at 18 months. Some people are willing to wait, but most aren't, and that's okay with me; I tell them to hang on for as long as they can.

However, if their male dog will be taken to visit dog parks on a regular basis, then I tell them to neuter before he really begins to elicit a response from the neutered adult males there – usually by 10 months of age. If not, one day when his hormonal signature becomes a threat, the neutered dogs will go for him (though he will be blamed, because he is the intact one), and his happy-go-lucky attitude toward other dogs might change forever. And that's just not worth an extra couple of months of testosterone in my book.

The people who have my males are responsible caretakers who don't permit them to roam and who don't have unspayed females in the household.

## “IRRELEVANT,” SAY MANY IN RESCUE

Jennifer Mieuli Jameson, founder of Loup Garou, a San Francisco group that rescues black and dark-colored companion animals, went to law school, so she understands that there are always two (and usually more) sides to a story. Jameson respects the validity of the debate over early spay/neuter. And there have been rare cases when she has adopted out an unaltered animal who was too small or weak to undergo spay/neuter – though she retained legal ownership until proof of surgery was provided. But when it comes to the hard work she does day in and day out, driving all over northern California to pull at-risk animals out of shelters with little foot traffic and dim prospects of adoption, Jameson says there is no room for nuance.

“I'm a rescuer, so I'm not objective,” she says honestly. “The main thing in our lives is always going to be population control. A dog that's spayed early may have a problem or two down the line, but that is a dog that's not going to have puppies, and that is what we as rescuers are charged with. For good or bad, right or wrong, I'm okay with that.”

And so are many other people who work or volunteer in shelters or rescue groups, or who are committed to adopting only dogs from rescue; while there might be health risks associated with early spay/neuter, they are unlikely to abandon any helpful strategy in curbing overpopulation.

Kristen Head of Westville, New Jersey, adopted her collie/shepherd-mix from a shelter when he was three months old and already neutered. Delaying spay/neuter “is something that I definitely have read and thought about, but with Kobe there was no option, because the shelter wouldn't adopt any dog who wasn't altered,” she says. “I would prefer the option of having the spay/neuter conversation with my vet before I did it, but I definitely would always rescue” – even if it meant not having the option of delaying or foregoing sterilization surgery.



**Jennifer Mieuli Jameson,**  
founder of Loup Garou.



Frankly, I'm okay with ultra-responsible people leaving these males dogs intact as Mother Nature made them, for life. But for males who are at risk of being inadvertently bred – or whose breeders require in their contracts that they be sterilized – Dr. Zink recommends vasectomy. This renders the male unable to reproduce, but allows him to continue to produce testosterone.

While a male with a vasectomy won't be able to sire puppies, he likely will have difficulty fitting into some social situations, such as dog parks. A vasectomized dog still has his testicles and appears to be entire, and "lots of dog parks won't let you bring a dog in if it is intact," warns Dr. Zink. And because such dogs still produce testosterone, "and neutered dogs tend to be aggressive toward intact dogs" (not, as many believe, the other way around) the snipped males at the run will be just as snarky, because their noses will alert them to a vasectomized dog's unchanged testosterone levels.

As for dogs with retained testicles, "a study has been done that showed for every 100 dogs with retained testicles who live to be 10, 12 of them will get cancer of the testicle, though it is almost always benign," Dr. Zink says. Because this does not happen until the dog is older – around age seven or later – she recommends keeping dogs with retained testicles intact until they are three or four, then removing the retained testicle and vasectomizing the other.

## ACCEPTANCE; OBSTACLES

Of course, most shelters and rescues require spay/neuter surgery on every dog they place, and adopters are rarely permitted to dictate the timing of the surgery (though, presumably, most never ask). For many who rescue and rehome dogs, this entire discussion is moot; they are understandably more committed to saving unwanted dogs' lives than optimizing the lives of dogs obtained at puppyhood from a breeder.

Among my fellow breeders, the idea of delaying spay/neuter is no longer a hot button. Not everyone does it, but pretty much everyone respects your right to take a different approach – as long as the owners are responsible, and capable of preventing their animals from accidental breedings and of providing the scrupulous medical care and attention needed to detect signs of health problems, such as mammary or testicular cancer, that

can occur in intact dogs and those who were sterilized later in life.

And that brings us to the uncomfortable realization that spay/neuter also has much to do with issues of socio-economics and class. Cultural attitudes, knowledge base and lifestyle can vary dramatically, depending on where you live. That isn't to say that one category of owner is "better" than the other, just that they are different, and they come with different risk levels. Many rescuers or breeders feel their adopters or puppy people can't handle the very serious responsibility of deferring spay/neuter to a later date. Still others see the subject as a Pandora's box: If social attitudes soften and spay/neuter loses its sense of urgency, could it set back all the hard work done by committed rescuers?

Cultural attitudes aside, there is a pragmatic problem to taking an alternative approach to spay/neuter, such as removing only the female's uterus or performing a vasectomy on a male dog: many vets are not open to it. Author, blogger, and veterinarian Patty Khuly, of Sunset Animal Clinic in Miami, Florida, says she gets a few emails a week asking for help in finding a vet capable of and willing to perform the alternative procedures. Dr. Khuly responds by advising the emailers how to talk to their vets. "I tell them to explain that [the procedures] are described in surgery textbooks. Be thoughtful about why you want it done. Say, 'I know you think this is weird, but I have thought about it quite a bit. There are vets doing it across country, though there are not many of them. I've been told it's easier to do than a [conventional] spay/neuter.' The vet might be curious enough to attempt it."

While conventional spay/neuter practices and schedules will likely be the norm for the foreseeable future, as with every other important decision that you must make about your dog's care and feeding, it's important to inform yourself about the advantages and disadvantages of early, adult, or no spay/neuter surgery – and then make a decision that is right for you and your individual dog. Once that choice is made – no matter what choice it is – take responsibility for the consequences. 🐾

*Denise Flaim of Revodana Ridgebacks in Long Island, New York, shares her home with three intact Ridgebacks, three 8-year-old children, and a very patient husband.*

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# Put to Good Use

*What are the most useful behaviors you can teach your dog? Several trainers share methods for training their favorites.*

BY PAT MILLER, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, CDBC

If you had to choose one behavior as the single most useful one among all the behaviors you have taught your dog, which would it be? We asked that question of a half-dozen professional positive pet trainers, and not surprisingly, got a half-dozen different answers.

My own choice would be the “Wait” behavior. A puzzling choice, perhaps, for a trainer who professes to value relationships with dogs based on asking them “to do” things rather than “not do” things, but my choice, nonetheless. In a multi-dog household, this is an invaluable cue. I use it when I come downstairs in the morning, asking the pack to “Wait” on the landing so I can make it to the bottom of the staircase without tripping over multiple furry bodies. I use it at the door, asking those with less-reliable

recalls to wait while the more-reliables go out first to enjoy a bit more freedom. Then Bonnie must wait while 14-year-old Missy, with mobility issues, trundles down the three stairs to outside. Finally, Dubhy and Bonnie are released to go out, with me following right behind to keep them under my direct supervision. We use “Wait” multiple times as we do barn chores, carrying hay, moving horses and pushing wheelbarrows out the gate while leaving the dogs in the barn. And so it goes throughout the day.

## ANOTHER “WAITER”

Trainer Cindy Mauro, of Bergen County, New Jersey, whose household also includes multiple dogs, agrees with me about the value of “Wait.” (Mauro is shown here with three of her dogs waiting on cue at the top of her front stairs – a valuable behavior when said stairs are icy!) Mauro suggests that “wait” is also invaluable to prevent dogs from flying out of open car doors and to keep them calm on walks. We both teach it initially with a food bowl, and then generalize it to doorways and other scenarios. Here’s how:



With your dog sitting at your side, hold her food bowl at chest level and tell her to “Wait!” Use a *cheerful* tone of voice, not a threatening one. Move the food bowl (with food in it, topped with tasty treats) toward the floor two to four inches. If your dog stays sitting, click your clicker or use a verbal marker, raise the bowl back up to its original height, and feed her a treat from the bowl. If your dog gets up, don’t click! Say “Oops!” instead, and ask her to sit again. “Oops!” is a “no-reward marker” – it tells her that getting up didn’t earn a treat – the opposite of a clicker or verbal reward marker, which tells her she did earn a reward.

Now lower the bowl two to four inches again, click and treat. Repeat this step several times until your dog consistently remains sitting as you lower the bowl. Gradually move the bowl closer to the floor with successive repetitions, returning to full height to feed the treat after each click, until you can place it on the floor without your dog trying to get up or eat it.

Finally, place the bowl on the floor and tell her to eat. The beauty of this exercise is that you have two built-in obvious practice opportunities every day (if you feed your dog twice a day, as I do).

**Teaching your dog to “wait” when you open a car door (or any other door) is a potentially life-saving skill. Practice in low-distraction environments first (like a closed garage) and gradually introduce more distractions.**





**For some dogs, lying down is easier than sitting; start teaching “Wait” with your dog in whichever posture is most comfortable for him to maintain.**



**Lower the bowl just a few inches at first. If he holds his position, mark the behavior with a click or verbal signal (such as “Yes!”), straighten up, and give him a treat.**



**Choose a cue (such as “Release!” or “Okay!”) to let him know when he is free to get up and eat the food and/or treats in the bowl.**

When your dog will wait reliably for her food bowl, you can begin to “generalize” the cue by practicing at the door – another natural practice opportunity, since most dogs go in and out of doors several times a day. Ask her to sit at the door, and tell her to “Wait” – cheerfully! Reach for the doorknob. If she stays sitting, click and treat. If she gets up, say “Oops!” and ask her to sit again.

When she will stay sitting, increase the difficulty by touching the doorknob, jiggling the doorknob, opening the door a crack, and gradually increasing the amount you open the door. Click and treat several times at each increment before proceeding to the next step. As with the food bowl, if your dog is having trouble succeeding, back up, and take smaller steps.

## PLACE

C.C. Casale, PMCT, CPDT-KA, of South-Paw Pet Care LLC in Charleston, South Carolina, puts “Go to your place!” at the top of *her* list. She explains that this behavior became very necessary when her Rough Collie, Valentino, joined the family and taught Rocco, her Sicilian Greyhound, how much fun it can be to bark at people approaching the front door or ringing the doorbell.

Casale says, “I taught this skill by capturing the behavior when it was naturally offered by either of our two dogs. The plan was to use this behavior when someone visited our front door so we could keep the dogs safe, away from the open door, and in a settled position, to prevent over-excitement. My husband and I already allowed our dogs to lie on our

living room loveseat, which is covered with a fur-friendly slipcover. It was an obvious choice to teach them to ‘Place,’ based on proximity to the front door and their predisposition to enjoy staying in that location.

First, I used a cue they know, ‘Up,’ and practiced the behavior by having them jump up on the loveseat when cued, followed with a prompt of my outstretched arm and finger pointing to the couch cushion. I then changed the cue to ‘Place’ by saying it after the cue ‘Up’ and using the same visual prompt of my outstretched arm and finger. After repeating this to reliability, I removed

the ‘Up’ cue, and only used the verbal ‘Place’ cue with prompting. The last step was to remove the prompt after they both reliably offered the behavior when asked, 8 out of 10 times.

“Next, I had someone they know very well (my husband) approach the front door and then walk away. I gradually increased the stimulus by having him open and close the front door and walk away, then enter and walk away, and eventually ring the door bell and enter our home. I then generalized the behavior by having a neighbor the dogs knew well repeat the entire process until they were able to stay in ‘Place.’”



**Managing one dog when someone comes to the door of your home is one thing, but when trainer C.C. Casale added a second dog to her family, she found it necessary to teach both dogs a formal “go to your place” behavior in order to keep order – and to keep dogs and guests safe.**

**The dogs were initially taught to jump onto the loveseat on cue. Then Casale put mats on the loveseat and taught the dogs to go to the mats. Finally, she was able to teach them to go to the mats, wherever they were.**

Next, we asked another neighbor they'd met but didn't know well to do the same. The final test was doing the exercise with strangers like delivery men.

"Finally, we needed to generalize the behavior to other locations. To do this, I took each of their flat rectangular beds and placed them on the loveseat. This created a smaller visual marker upon which they could practice 'Place.' It also gave us a portable 'Place' mat we could use anywhere. We now take their beds with us wherever we go, and 'The Boyz' have a ready made 'Place' when we need them to settle for a while. This is very helpful when going to dinner at friends' homes, and in the vet office waiting room. A small bath mat or yoga mat cut in half work well as place mats; both are easy to roll up and carry anywhere."

## RECALL

Coming when called is a likely choice of a "most useful" behavior for many trainers and owners. This invaluable behavior adds a layer of safety to any dog's world, and allows canine family members to enjoy a greater degree of freedom. Lisa Waggoner, PMCT2, CPDT-KA, of Cold Nose College in Murphy, North Carolina, was reminded of the importance of a good recall when a new puppy joined her family.

Waggoner says, "A solid recall has allowed me to feel comfortable with Willow in many environments, including large indoor environments as well as outdoor environments, and to have confidence that while working off-leash, I can easily recall her to me. I've started calling it a Rocket Recall Recipe. I love training it and I love maintaining it.

"It's a learned behavior, just like any other behavior I want to teach a dog. I classically condition the dog's name by pairing it with high-value food so that I get a whiplash turn to me when I say the dog's name.

"Then I classically condition the recall cue by pairing it with very high-value food (for Willow it's Vienna sausage). My cue is 'Come, come, come!' delivered in rapid fire staccato manner – and actually,

the 'm' isn't really pronounced, so it sounds more like 'Co, co, come!'

"After conditioning the cue, I then say the cue and run away from the dog, taking advantage of her natural desire to chase. When she follows, I click and deliver six to eight pea-sized pieces of extremely yummy food, one bit after another. Because I tap into my inner Looney Tunes character, it's FUN for her! If I have any doubt about the dog following me, I'll begin on-leash, then transition off-leash, because I want her to be successful so she can get reinforced. I want her to get it right.

"Practice inside first, so that the recall is very reliable, before ever taking it out of doors. An off-leash indoor recall is like a high school diploma – pretty easy to get. An off-leash, outdoor recall is like a PhD; it takes a lot more work.

"Then practice outside. Because of our fenced acreage I really never did any on-leash work outdoors with her; it was all off-leash. I continued to get her attention by using her name (Willow!); then, when she looked at me, I delivered the recall cue 'Co, co, come!' (that's really what it sounds like), ran away, reinforced heavily with yummy food, then released her to 'go play' again. I very slowly increased the distance, then ping-ponged back and forth between short distances and longer distances. I practiced in a variety of environments and always made sure she could 'get it right' so that she'd get reinforced for being successful. The environments were at home (indoors and out), at the training center, and at a nearby park (on a long line, then off-leash because it was a safe area).

"When she was consistently successful at returning to me in all of

the above locations with no distractions, I began using distractions: Brad (my husband, also a trainer) or Brad and Cody (our other Australian Shepherd) walking in the pasture; another person in the training center; a person a distance away at the park, etc.). I drastically decreased the distance I expected her to travel with each new distraction, then slowly increased that distance as she was consistently successful.

"My next big step was to begin practicing when she was playing with other dogs during our off-leash, outdoor socials for clients and their dogs. Again, wanting her to be successful, I'd wait until she had played for 20-30 minutes and was a bit tired. Then as she was beginning to disengage from a particular play group, I'd say her name, 'Willow!' She'd look immediately at me, and I'd deliver my recall cue 'Co, co, come!' and run away. Voila! She'd chase me and I'd pay off big time! I slowly increased my distance from her before I delivered the cue and she was successful yet again.

"When working in a new location, I'd again set her up for success by decreasing the distance, saying her name, delivering the cue, running away, and paying her with a big jackpot.

The following are more vital ingredients for Waggoner's "Rocket Recall Recipe."

- ✓ Reward all check-in's indoors (any time the dog happens to come up and say "Hi"). Reward all check-in's when outdoors, then release to "go play."
- ✓ Never use the recall cue if you plan to do something to your

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**Trainer Lisa Waggoner practices "rocket recalls" with her young Australian Shepherd, Willow. She uses a special, high-value food as a reward, and increases the distractions only incrementally, as Willow proves to be capable of ignoring them.**



*The following are links to videos of Lisa Waggoner working on "rocket recalls."*

*The first two steps of teaching a recall:*  
[youtube.com/watch?v=1kr3g-myic](https://youtube.com/watch?v=1kr3g-myic)

*Maintenance practice in a pasture:*  
[youtube.com/watch?v=axnjcb2Dn1k](https://youtube.com/watch?v=axnjcb2Dn1k)

*Practice at the beach:*  
[youtube.com/watch?v=OW5mM0ARkNI](https://youtube.com/watch?v=OW5mM0ARkNI)

*Practice in a brand new location:*  
[youtube.com/watch?v=cR7IPkzkOtQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=cR7IPkzkOtQ)

dog that your dog finds unpleasant (such as clipping nails or taking a bath).

- ✓ Never call your dog if you don't think your dog will come (i.e., if he's entranced by the sight of a squirrel or deer).
- ✓ If you make a mistake on the above, "save" the recall by finding your inner Looney Tunes character, squealing, clapping, patting your legs while running away from him so that he'll return to you and you can reward him.
- ✓ Never repeat the cue; say it only once and then make yourself as interesting as possible with a high voice, clapping, squatting, squeaking a squeaky toy, etc.
- ✓ Always pay off big time, with food or something else your dog loves – a "life reward."
- ✓ Practice, practice, practice!

## NAME RECOGNITION

Chris Danker, CPDT-KA, PMCT3, KPA-CTP, of Hemlock Hollow LLC in Albany County, New York, concurs with Waggoner on the importance of name recognition and recalls, and gives additional tips for the name response behavior.

Danker suggests starting on-leash and following these steps:

"Say your dog's name, then click and treat. Repeat this step hundreds of times. For the first 50 or so repetitions your dog doesn't have to be doing anything in particular. Start when you are sitting, then practice standing, and take a step or two as you say your dog's name.

"If your dog has enough deposits in his name-response bank account he will look at you when he hears his name. If he doesn't, help him out by putting a treat near his nose and luring him toward you. Give him the treat and practice more repetitions with higher-value reinforcers. Use better treats such as freeze dried tripe or all-meat jars of baby food. You want to pay off big for him responding to his name. Save these special treats for your name game training so you keep them special!

"Practice first in all rooms of the house, then outside in a quiet area, and eventually in locations with more distractions. When your dog immediately looks back at you upon hearing his name, add distance. Then take the game outdoors. Your mission is accomplished when your dog will respond in an empty parking lot; when there is other activity around you; even when other dogs or wildlife are around!

## REVERSE

Sharon Messersmith, owner of Canine Valley Training Facility in Reading, Pennsylvania, chose a less common behavior as her favorite: teaching her dog to back up. She uses his "Back" cue to remove tension on the leash when he's too far out in front of her, and to get him out of potential trouble spots.

Messersmith says, "I taught my dog (a 105-pound Labrador named Benson) the behavior using a combination of luring and shaping. I started by holding a treat in front of him at chest level, and moving it toward him. He would back up to follow it. Once he began offering the behavior I was looking for I added the word, and started to use it with the luring and prompting. I then taught it to reliability by cueing him to back into the space where he always eats. His dinner was his reward! I then practiced backing him across the deck, up a few steps, across the back seat of the car – anywhere I could think of – and then feeding him. He would walk a mile backward to eat!

"I use this behavior all the time. When he is pulling on the leash, I stop and ask him to 'Back.' He will back up into position and we continue walking. I back him out when he is too close to another dog. I back him off the pool steps (from a distance) when another dog is trying to get out of the pool. I use 'Back' when in parades, for positioning him for pictures or grooming, or when I need to

spread out a carpet or blanket and he's in the way – any time I need him to move back! When you have a dog who is more than 100 pounds it's a whole lot easier to ask him to move than to try to physically move him. This saves me a lot of strained muscles with all my dogs.

"At the Peaceable Paws Level 1 Trainer Academy, I learned a new way to teach 'Back' – and I prefer it to the method I used for my own dog. This way is all shaping, no luring. Standing a foot away from a wall, I toss a treat between my legs and have the dog go get it. Because the wall is there, he can't go all the way through. (I can block the sides with boxes or chairs, if necessary). When he backs up, I click, and reward by tossing the next treat between my legs. This sets him up for the next repetition of get-the-treat-and-back-up. When the dog is performing this routine easily I add the cue, 'Back,' and eventually can begin using it to elicit steps backward without tossing the treat. I find with shaping I get a lot less sitting and more walking backward."

## CRATING

Bob Ryder, PMCT, CPDT-KA, of Pawsitive Transformations in Normal, Illinois, says his Labrador Retriever's best behavior is going in her crate. Crating is useful for safe travel, stress-free confinement at home or away, and almost mandatory for dogs who need "restricted activity" for medical reasons.

Ryder proudly claims, "Daisy is a world class pro at going to and settling in her crate. It's one of her favorite behaviors, and comes in handy literally every day, both at home and on the road; in the car, in motels, and in our camper – we take her with us on vacations and for almost all overnight car travel.

"Daisy first came to me as a board-and-train student for clients who couldn't take her on vacations. I trained her with lure-and-reward techniques, gradually increasing challenges including distance from the crate and distractions such as the doorbell, the presence of guests, etc.

"Our first exercise began with just dropping a few very high-value treats (roast chicken bits) on the floor right about dinnertime when she was hungry. She was allowed to gobble them up with no behavior required other than four feet on the floor. Oops, one or two landed inside the crate while the door was closed and Daisy was locked out. It instantly



**Trainer Bob Ryder thinks it's important for all dogs to love going in and being in their crates – just like his dog, Daisy.**

built her desire to get inside. I quickly opened the door to let her in, and allowed her to come out whenever she wanted.

“After a bit of practice, I started asking her to sit before letting her in. (She already knew the ‘sit’ cue.) After a few sessions (one to two minutes each, all the same day), I dropped a few treats into the crate while she was already inside eating the ones I had dropped while she was outside. Gradually, I increased the time between dropping pieces into the crate, and also cued her to ‘down,’ then ‘down/stay’ while she was in the crate. (She was already fluent at these behaviors.) Once she was solid on the down/stay in crate with the door open, I closed the door briefly while treating, then opened it before she was done finding the tidbits in the blanket folds.

“Next sessions were done after lots of physical/mental exercise so she was tired, again while she was hungry. I added a frozen peanut butter-stuffed Kong to the equation. While the door was closed she focused on the Kong, then fell asleep for a nap. Several times I called her out of the crate before she awoke on her own, each time unobtrusively dropping a few crunchy treats back in the crate for her to come and find later.

“When it was clear that she was happy to go into her crate, I added a ‘crate up’ cue to ask her to go in. Over time, we played more crate games, using a variety of high-value reinforcers, and cueing

her to go to her crate from increasingly greater distances.

“Now, Daisy will literally fly into her crate on cue from anywhere upon hearing our verbal ‘crate up!’ cue. I have cued her from her crate in the car when we’ve arrived home, and she sprints from the

car to her crate in my office, bypassing any and all distractions. It’s standard operating procedure now when we have company, when the UPS or pizza delivery guy rings the bell, and when we are eating dinner and want her to settle, without sacrificing tidbits from our plates. Daisy thinks her crate is just great. So do I!”

## WHAT'S YOUR DOG'S MVB?

Your dog’s “most valuable behavior” might not have made this list. Perhaps you found some new ones here to try – and maybe one will steal the Number One slot from your current favorite. What’s important is recognizing that we train our dogs for real-life reasons, not just for high-scoring performances in competition rings, and that the behaviors we teach have real-life value. The bottom line? Teaching your dog useful behaviors enhances the quality of her life – and yours – and all who interact with her. 🐾

*Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, CDBC, is WDJ's Training Editor. She lives in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center, where she offers dog training classes and courses for trainers. Pat is also author of many books on positive training. See page 24 for more information.*

## RESOURCES

- ❖ **C.C. CASALE, PMCT, CPDT-KA**  
SouthPaw Pet Care, LLC, Charleston, SC. (843) 819-6633; southpaw-petcare.com
- ❖ **CHRISTINE DANKER, PMCT3, CPDT-KA, KPA-CTP**  
Hemlock Hollow, LLC, Albany County, NY. (518) 495-7387; hemlockhollowdogtraining.com
- ❖ **CINDY MAURO, CPDT-KA**  
Cindy Mauro Dog Training, Bergen County, NJ. (973) 728-8691; CindyMauroDogTraining.com
- ❖ **SHARON MESSERSMITH CPDT-KA, CDBC**  
Canine Valley Training Facility, Reading PA. (610) 223-3981; caninevalleytraining.com
- ❖ **PAT MILLER, CPDT-KA, CBCC-KA, CDBC**  
Peaceable Paws, Fairplay, MD. (301) 582-9420; peaceablepaws.com
- ❖ **BOB RYDER, PMCT1, CPDT-KA**  
Pawsitive Transformations, Normal, IL. (309) 451-8348; pawstrans.com
- ❖ **LISA WAGGONER, CPDT-KA, PMCT-2**  
Cold Nose College, Murphy, NC. (828) 644-9148; coldnosecollege.com

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- ❖ **Sarah Richardson**, CPDT-KA, CDBC, The Canine Connection, Chico, CA. Training, puppy classes, socialization sessions, “playcare,” boarding. Force-free, fun, positive training. (530) 345-1912; [thecanineconnection.com](http://thecanineconnection.com)

**HOLISTIC VETERINARIANS**

- ❖ **American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (AHVMA)**. PO Box 630, Abingdon, MD 21009. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a list of holistic veterinarians in your area, or search [ahvma.org](http://ahvma.org)

**BOOKS AND DVDS**

- ❖ WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of *Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog*; *Positive Perspectives 2: Know Your Dog, Train Your Dog*; *Power of Positive Dog Training*; *Play With Your Dog*; and *Do Over Dogs: Give Your Dog a Second Chance at a First Class Life*. Available from [dogwise.com](http://dogwise.com) or [wholedogjournal.com](http://wholedogjournal.com)

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