

Plant-Based Proteins for Pet Food

Consumer focus on animal and planetary health is driving demand for plant-based pet food and treats. As manufacturers explore ways to include ethical and sustainability claims on their products, two key challenges must be addressed:

- #1: Choosing a plant protein.
- #2: Making plant-based protein taste great.

Read on to learn more about the plant-based pet food trend and how FONA is working to improve the taste and flavor of plant-based ingredients.

Health concerns are impacting protein consumption trends.

Consumers have growing concerns about how animal sourced protein affects personal and environmental health. According to Mintel, a market research firm, the themes and trends in pet food tend to echo those in human food. As expected, consumers who believe that plant-based foods are healthier for them and the environment are transitioning their pets to similar diets.

Can pets even have plant-based diets?

Short answer: yes.

Long answer: it depends. Dogs are omnivores and naturally seek a balanced diet that includes plants, grains, and protein. Cats, on the other hand, are obligate carnivores and crave a diet that is mostly protein based. While research suggests that animal proteins can be replaced effectively with plant-based proteins, both species are hardwired to crave food that is highly savory in taste and aroma.

Gen Z and millennials are the most likely to make their pets' diets more plant-based.

Out of all generations, Gen Z and millennials (18-34 year olds) are the most likely to have their dogs mimic their own diets. This likelihood is primarily influenced by the fact that they care the most about our planet's health. The sustainable, ethical, and environmentally friendly claims of plant-based proteins align closely with their core values.

As such, they're the most likely to stray away from animal protein, and they are also the most inclined to believe that plant protein can be just as nutritious as animal sourced protein.

Areas of consumer focus to address:

Conscientious pet owners have several demands that need to be addressed by their pets' food.

- » Sustainability
- » Ethical sourcing
- » Safety
- » Transparency
- » Nutrition
- » Overall health benefits

While these attributes are important, FONA's consumer research shows that pet owners prioritize balanced nutrition and taste above all else.

What are the options for plant protein?

When it comes to plant protein, a blend of sources is considered to have the most functional benefit. While more traditional proteins come from soybeans, peas and potatoes are easier to source. Pet parents also look towards their own healthy diets to find the right protein sources for their pets (like chickpeas and quinoa).



Exploring new sources of plant protein.

Peas have long been a favorite source of plant protein for both human and pet food applications. It has also been a major contributor to the rise and continued popularity of the grain-free pet food trend. However, these grain-free diets have recently been linked to instances of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) in dogs. Expectedly, pea protein has come under scrutiny. While this research remains controversial, pet parents have expressed concern; new products are no longer making grain-free claims to the extent that they used to. Regardless, there is still a wide variety of plant sources to derive proteins from.

Established	Soybean, pea, lupine, potato, wheat, corn
Emerging	Fava bean, chickpea, lentil, marrowfat, beans
Upcoming	Quinoa, duckweed, sunflower, green leaves, micro-algae

Palatability matters.

Pet parents remain skeptical about the taste and flavor of plant-based food and are concerned that their pets won't accept it. Surprisingly, pet owners are highly receptive of ingredients like natural flavor as a way to improve palatability and support clean labels. According to our 2021 National Pet Parent Survey, 83% of dog parents and 78% of cat parents approve of using natural flavor. So how do natural flavors taste like meat when they aren't sourced from animals? Many compounds found in animal products can be

extracted from plant sources like corn and potatoes. By combining these ingredients in just the right amounts, flavorists can create savory, plant-based natural flavors that mimic the savory flavor profiles of meats like chicken, beef, pork, and more.

Key takeaways.

Due to growing concerns over personal and planetary health, Gen Z and millennials are trending towards using more plant based protein in their own and their pets' diets. Plant protein becoming a mainstay in pets' diets depends heavily on whether it's just as delicious and nutritious as its meat counterpart. In other words, palatability and the types of proteins to use are the top primary concerns for pet owners. Fortunately, nutritious plant proteins come from many sources, and FONA is ready help with taste modification and highly palatable natural flavors that cats and dogs will love.



Ready to turn your plant-based product into the tastier choice?

Contact us at:
www.fona.com/chat
petcare@fona.com
630-578-8600

