

Feed Your Pet Right: The Authoritative Guide to Feeding Your Dog and Cat

By Marion Nestle and Malden C. Nesheim

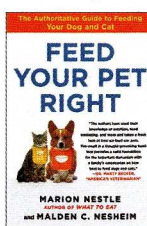
Free Press; \$16.99

Reviewed by Leslie Crane Rugg and

Eva Saks

FEED YOUR PET RIGHT IS AN INVALUABLE overview of the invention, production, distribution, marketing and regulation of pet food. This handy paperback covers everything from the “big picture” (nutritional standards, labeling lingo and industry structure) to consumer tips (for example, on the label, every ingredient listed after salt is negligible in amount). Food, supplements, treats, chews and snacks are all addressed.

At a time when the debate over canine diets—raw, grain-free, home-cooked, vegetarian, organic—has reached a frenzy, Nestle and Nesheim bring a calming tone to the subject. Leaving ideology behind, they clear a path through the jungle of dog food choices. Nestle, an NYU professor of nutrition, food studies and public health, and Nesheim, a Cornell professor emeritus of nutritional sciences, are academics active in food politics. At its best, their book is groundbreaking, as in the chapter on conflicts of interest in the cozy and unquestioned relationship between pet food manufacturers and veterinary schools/veterinarians. Veterinary school curricula generally do not cover nutrition. Pet food companies happily fill this gap by providing free courses, textbooks, lab equipment and industry internships. Small wonder that many veterinarians sell food made by the very companies that taught them pet nutrition.



Also noteworthy is the chapter examining the ethics of pet food research. According to the authors, impartial scientists do not conduct such research; it is done exclusively by pet food companies and carefully designed to prove that their products are beneficial. Industry studies analyzed by the authors were further weakened by specific protocol failures, including inadequate subject pools and sloppy control groups. Moreover, industry research is characterized by secrecy. Contrary to good science, these studies cannot be reproduced by an independent third party.

Certain “Conclusions” by the authors are provocative, particularly that “Commercial Pet Foods Are Pretty Much Alike, Nutritionally Speaking” and “By-Products Are By-Products, and Not Necessarily Bad.” Can a kibble made with agricultural-grade grain and unspecified animal by-products *really* be as nutritious as one containing a named organic protein and vegetables? And why does the book give such short shrift to both the benefits and drawbacks of raw feeding?

In addition, their analysis of home-cooked and raw diets underrates the benefits of whole foods for dogs and of controlling the contents of your pet’s food. This is particularly surprising given Nestle’s emphasis on whole foods for people in *What to Eat* and her alarm over the lack of quality control in the pet food industry in *Pet Food Politics*. In *Feed Your Pet Right*, most kibbles are deemed equivalent and as good as homemade food. But how can extruded, rendered, non-human-grade sources provide the same quality as whole, fresh foods meeting USDA “people food”—or, even better, organic—standards?

Notwithstanding these concerns, the authors’ assertion that “balance, variety and moderation work for pet food as well as for human food” is a welcome and commonsensical conclusion. The underlying message is a Canine Golden Rule: do for your dog as you would do for yourself. Every dog person will learn something from this must-read book.