

Owners show interest in vegan diets for their pets

By Josh Loeb

ONLY a very small minority of dogs and cats are currently fed an exclusively vegan diet. However, around one in three owners say they may be willing to consider switching to a vegan diet for their pet in the future.

An online survey of more than 3600 dog and cat owners – predominantly inhabitants of English-speaking countries – found 1.6 per cent of dogs and 0.7 per cent of cats are fed a wholly vegan diet at present.

The research, 'Plant-based (vegan) diets for pets: A survey of pet owner attitudes and feeding practices', published in the journal *Plos One*, found 35 per cent of pet owners who did not already feed a vegan diet to their pet indicated an interest in doing so.

Of these, 55 per cent stipulated additional requirements that would need to be met before they would feed vegan pet food to their dog or cat. Among the requirements they cited were evidence of nutritional sufficiency, veterinary approval and increased availability of vegan pet food.

The majority of dog or cat owners (65 per cent) said they would not feed a vegan diet to their pet regardless of whether one existed which met all their criteria.

All those who said they fed a vegan diet to their pet were themselves non-meat eaters, and meat-avoiding pet owners appeared to be more likely to keep cats than dogs (although the authors of the study said that this did not necessarily indicate that vegans or vegetarians had a preference for cats over dogs).

According to the academics behind the survey, a total of one dog owner and two cat owners said they fed their pet exclusively on 'homemade' vegan food.

'Despite the small number, this finding is particularly concerning, as complete and balanced homemade diets are challenging for pet owners to make even with the inclusion of animal products, while homemade vegetarian and vegan diets have been considered contraindicated in cats,' the authors wrote.

An association between meat avoidance in pet owners and 'guilt' associated with pet food has been previously documented.

However, the authors of the paper wrote that 'the perceived paucity of evidence supporting plant-based diets for pets, concern of veterinary disapproval, and challenges with availability reported in this survey all likely contribute to an effective case against plant-based pet foods.'

They predicted that, as the prevalence of veganism increases,



the demand for plant-based pet foods will also increase – regardless of the expansion of 'ethically raised' meat in the pet food market.

BVA junior vice president Daniella Dos Santos said: 'We would not recommend feeding a dog a vegan diet. Cats are obligate carnivores and should not be fed a vegetarian or vegan diet. While on paper a diet may include supplements or alternatives to animal-based protein, there is no evidence these would be bioavailable to the cat or that they wouldn't interfere with the action of other nutrients.'

'Robust, peer-reviewed research is needed to ensure that non-animal protein sources can meet the pet's dietary requirements. Any changes to a pet's diet should always be undertaken under the advice of a vet with in-depth nutritional knowledge.'

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