

## **Grain Free diets**

### **“And the truth shall set you free”**

As a pet owner, I found myself overwhelmed by the immense variety of pet food available today. I can't imagine what my clients think or go through when walking those aisles looking for the best food. The pet food industry is extremely competitive as it grosses billions per year. More and more companies want to be part of this industry. Some companies are reputable and conduct rigorous testing of their products to ensure high quality and superb nutrition. Other companies... not so much. Blue Buffalo (Recalled 4 times already) and Rachel Ray Foods (Mrs. Ray makes lovely kitchen pots but has little knowledge in pet nutrition).

With marketing bombarding their products as their best, let's talk about “Boutique” diets. Grain free diets to be exact marketed as healthier with no nutritional science and made of exotic ingredients. We have seen a trend in patients being diagnosed with heart disease. Are these boutique diets responsible? Maybe.

Dilated Cardiomyopathy DCM is a disease of the heart muscle. The affected heart beats are weak and the heart is generalized larger than normal. Cardiologists have noticed also some patients have improved when the diet was changed from boutique to a normal, well balanced diet.

Then why are people still feeding grain free diets? I think many clients have fallen victim of false advertising portraying exotic ingredients as healthier than more typical ingredients. In fact, there is no scientific proof stating that grain free diets significantly improve dogs' health. Grains are used as source of protein, vitamins, and minerals.

The use of exotic ingredients actually is more difficult than it seems. It must be taken into account bioavailability, metabolism, and digestibility. Exotic ingredients use require vast knowledge, many years of research and significant expertise. Therefore, I would be wary of a small company effectively advertising dog food since this might indicate their investment goes to marketing and not so much to food quality.

So, what should you do?

Reconsider your dog's diet. Changing the diet to more typical ingredients manufactured by a company with good reputation is actually not a bad idea.

Be careful with rating websites that rank pet foods either on opinion or based on myths and unsupported claims. Use more objective criteria such as nutritional expertise, quality control, and research. If you insist on feeding a boutique diet, then please watch for early signs of heart disease-weakness, slowing down, exercise intolerance, shortness of breath, heavy breathing, coughing or fainting. Consultation with a veterinary cardiologist might be warranted.

The choices we make for your pets can greatly impact their lives. Some clients choose wisely, other clients may elect walking in the wrong direction when marketing outpaces research, science, and professional advice.

Together we can make better choices to keep our best friends healthy and happy.