

# Growing Organically

*The organic pet products market is steadily growing. Retailers that align themselves with reputable manufacturers will see success in the category.* BY LINDSEY WOJCIK



Organic products represent a small but growing segment of the pet care industry, with more manufacturers than ever offering up this type of fare for pet retailers that want to put themselves at the leading edge of the natural movement.

Of course, the human food and beverage sector is brimming with organic products as health- and eco-conscious consumers see and feel the benefits of a more natural diet, so it should come as no surprise that the pet industry is following suit. "Because consumers are looking more closely at their own food ingredients, they have begun looking deeper at their pets' food, too," says Heather Govea, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Natural Balance Pet Foods.

With pet parents keeping a closer eye on nutrition, Heidi Nevala, owner of Natura Petz, a manufacturer of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-certified organic supplements for cats and dogs, finds that these shoppers are increasingly becoming more educated on what constitutes organic standards.

"More and more pet parents believe there is a link between wellness in their animals, and the use of plant-based therapeutics," she says. "For those customers, there is an underlying belief that organic products provide greater benefits over their pets' lifetime, in terms of maintaining [optimal] health, as well as in helping to delay or prevent disease."

However, although some pet owners are recognizing the benefits of organic products for their pets, it is still a niche market. Organic makes up a small percentage of the food pet owners are feeding their pets. Only six percent of dog owners surveyed for the 2011-2012 American Pet Products Association's *National Pet Owner Survey* purchased organic food, with few using it most often—just two percent.

John Gigliotti, president of Whole Life Pet Products, which currently produces two USDA-certified organic treats, says the organic trend in the pet products industry is still about five years behind the human sector. "The majority of pet owners are not yet convinced that the added cost of organic is worth it," he says. "It's a small niche of the natural pet products industry, but one that we believe is growing and reflects the future."

Some consumers' slow acceptance may be due to the fact that the terms natural and organic can be confusing to those who may not necessarily understand the qualifications for such marketing claims. This often leads shoppers to view products with natural or organic claims with skepticism, says Nevala.

To clarify the terminology and convince consumers to dig deeper into their wallets for organic pet products, manufacturers are investing heavily in the category by working hard to obtain organic certifications and seals of approval to put on their product labels. In fact, certification is required to be marketed as organic. It is often a lengthy and expensive process for a product to be evaluated and accredited as organic, but manufacturers say it is well worth the time and effort.

"From a consumer perspective, I think the

USDA organic certification is probably the most identifiable and likely credible label for pet food products," Nevala says. The USDA-organic seal verifies that a product was made with 95-percent or more certified-organic content. If a product label claims it was made with specified organic ingredients, the company must be sure those specific ingredients are certified organic.

"With certifiers, it indicates that the entire manufacturing process has been stringently evaluated, including protecting our fragile environment through sustainable growth and harvesting procedures."

Sustainable growth and harvesting procedures for organic products begins with soil, which must be free of prohibited substances, such as petroleum or sewage-based fertilizers, chemical pesticides, GMOs, antibiotics, hormones and other synthetics. Additionally, the company has to maintain a detailed written record of all its product processes, and its sales are audited.

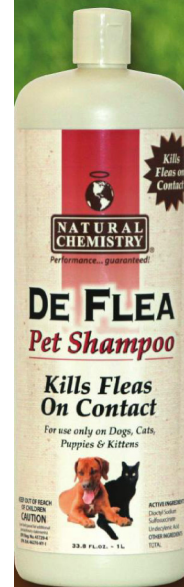
Some pet product manufacturers seek certifications from other domestic and international organizations, in addition to the USDA's certification. Natural Balance's Dick Van Patten Organic Formulas for dogs—which contain organic chicken, organic brown rice, organic oats and organic barley—has the Organic Crop Improvement Association's (OCIA) seal prominently displayed on its packaging.

"The OCIA is one of the world's oldest and most trusted leaders in the organic certification industry," Govea says. "To become certified organic, we submitted a written application to OCIA. Our application was then reviewed and approved by certifying agents, and our manufacturing facilities were inspected and approved according to USDA-organic regulations."

The experts agree that customers are increasingly looking for that seal on a product's packaging. "Labeling is very important in the organic category because clearly printed labels give the consumer immediate information when considering which food to choose for their pet," Govea says.

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**A SAMPLING OF ORGANIC**

**Natura Petz's** ([naturapetz.com](http://naturapetz.com)) offerings include an organic, veterinar-



ian supplement line to help support general health in dogs and cats, as well as specialty conditions such as allergies, UTIs, stones, tumors, diabetes and more. Products include I Am a Rock Star! for cognitive and glandular dysfunction; I Feel Good for immunity, inflammation and antioxidant support; Life's An Itch! for allergies and respiratory ailments; Joint Ease for joint and arthritis care; Stix & Stones for stones and crystals; Get Well Soon for tumors and cysts; Yummy Tummy for probiotic digestive, urinary and bladder; and Seal 'Em & Heal 'Em for all types of infections and wound care.

**Whole Life Pet Products** ([wholelifepet.com](http://wholelifepet.com)) has two certified-organic treats for dogs

and one certified-organic treat product for cats. The company's single-ingredient Certified Organic Sliced Chicken Breast treats for cats and dogs are made with USDA-certified organic hormone- and antibiotic-free chicken breast sourced from California-based Petaluma Poultry. The freeze-dried treats can be rehydrated in warm water to produce a soft, meaty texture ideal for older pets or those



that have difficulties with hard treats. Whole Life also offers USDA Certified Organic Sweet Potato treats for dogs, a single-ingredient, flash-frozen and freeze-dried treat made with organic sweet potatoes grown in Oregon using sustainable farming methods.

**Dick Van Patten's Natural Balance** Organic Formulas ([naturalbalanceinc.com](http://naturalbalanceinc.com)) contain ingredients that are grown without genetic engineering and are never sprayed with pesticides. The formula contains premium ingredients using free-roaming, humanely treated chicken with no added antibiotics or hormones. The formula also includes organic brown rice, organic oats, organic barley and organic potatoes. In 5-, 12.5, and 25-lb. bags.



**Brad's Raw Foods** ([bradsrawfoods.com](http://bradsrawfoods.com)) offers Brad's Raw 4 Paws organic vegan dog treats. The treats are made with fresh whole vegetables, fruits and seeds gently dehydrated below 115 degrees to preserve essential nutrients and enzymes. The human-quality treats are grain and gluten free and low glycemic. Flavors include: Yappy Yam, Apple-Tizer, Garden Gourmet, Up-Beet, Pizza Pizzazz and Pooch-Pouri.

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