



June 8, 2003

Grain or not in a dog's diet?

(This article is also available as a simple [text file version](#))

Carnivore or omnivore?

These classifications are man made. They can cause a lot of confusion if you try to apply them rigidly. It will suffice for you to acknowledge that there are some huge differences between the dog's gastrointestinal system and the human system. Whether both are within the spectrum of "omnivores" or the dog truly is a "carnivore" does not matter.

There is only one authority we can rely on: *Canis Lupus*, the wolf - as he would feed in a natural environment. The genetic differences between dogs and wolves are no greater than the differences between black and white people.

For this reason, the only feeding philosophy that makes sense will be an attempt to get as close as you can to what Mother Nature would feed a wolf. The bad news is that you cannot do this perfectly - most people simply don't have the supplies of whole live prey animals... and you don't want to give your dog its natural incentive to eat all the veggies it needs: starvation....

Using grain in commercial food

There are many powerful reasons for feeding grain:

- 1) Grain products are by far the cheapest source of energy you can get.
- 2) Grain products and their large contents of complex carbohydrates are generally considered healthy for humans, and it is easy (but completely incorrect) to conclude from this that they are also good for your dog.
- 3) Some dogs will gain weight (desirable for some people) when fed grain.
- 4) Many dogs happen to like grain products as much as kids like candy....
- 5) Many dogs appear to do well with substantial amounts of grain in their diet, at least for 7-10 years.... It is impossible to document in an individual case that it was *grain* that stopped the liver or the kidneys from letting it live another 3-4 years...
- 6) No adverse effects have been demonstrated by feeding smaller amounts of grain, as a minor supplement, and no large-scale study has ever been done to show that even substantial amounts of grain in the dog's diet can be directly related to any specific problems for any specific dog.

However, here are some good reasons for *not* feeding grain:

- 1) No canines in nature have access to grain as a significant food source, except for the small half-digested amounts they get through eating rodents whole.
- 2) Grains contain mostly complex carbohydrates - a group of nutrients dogs simply do not need at all. However, dogs *can* turn those carbohydrates into energy to replace the fat they are much better at utilizing.
- 3) Significant concentrations of carbohydrates in a single meal can severely hamper the chemistry of the digestion processes by increasing the pH to levels that make the digestion of raw food ineffective. This will be the case if the carbohydrate concentration in a meal reaches 10% or more.
- 4) Many dogs will lose excess weight when fed no grains - and some will lose weight when fed *some* grains.
- 5) Grain products, particularly when baked or cooked, will leave a layer of plaque on the teeth. Dogs do not have any enzymes in their saliva that can clean the teeth for those carbohydrates (as human saliva does).
- 6) Dogs fed kibble instead of a raw natural diet will have their life expectancy reduced by 30%. Kibble typically contains 70% grain products...
- 7) Most dogs do much better, health-wise, without any grain in their diet. No adverse effects have ever been documented for dogs that get no grain at all...

Where grain would fit into the picture of a natural diet

The tricky thing is that dogs could actually do quite well, at least short-term, on a meal that was almost exclusively made of grain products! This can have value for dogs that need to go gently on their stomach (keeping the pH around neutral is far less stressful than lowering it down to strong acidic levels). For sick dogs, this can sometimes make good sense. Also, for puppies that are too young to be able yet to digest raw food effectively without first having it predigested by their parents. And finally, for working dogs that need a fast energy boost for a specific performance that calls for a short burst of energy. But as a standard component of a regular diet, there should be no room for grains.

Mogens Eliassen

Mogens Eliassen holds a Ph.D. level degree in Chemistry from Århus University, Denmark and has 30+ years of experience working with dogs, dog owners, dog trainers, and holistic veterinarians as a coach, lecturer, and education system developer. He publishes a free newsletter "[The Peeing Post](#)" containing lots of tips and advice on dog problems of all kinds, particularly about training, behavioral problems, feeding, and health care.

For more information about Mogens Eliassen, including links to other articles he has published, please send a short e-mail to contact@k9joy.com.