

- Purina Beyond®'s study further revealed that nearly half of owners (45%) believe nutrition is the foundation of their dogs' health. Despite this, two in three (68%) are still unsure about what they should feed their pet.

"With a vast amount of information available for owners, we understand pet nutrition is often difficult to navigate," said Mr Hill. "Knowing what's in your dog's food and understanding their dietary needs can be confusing."

The findings show the aspects of feeding their dog that consumers find the most confusing are:

- Whether the food they feed their dog gives them everything they need – 37%
- Knowing what nutrition their dog needs – 30%
- What to feed their dog to maintain their health and wellbeing – 29%

"This research tells us that Australian dog owners are looking for natural food options with ingredients they recognise," said Mr Hill.

A 2015 Nielson study³ of American and French consumers examined just how far consumers are willing to take the trend of 'humanised' pet food, revealing some of the following key points:

- Pet owners are saying no to genetically modified ingredients (GMOs)
- Consumers increasingly prefer pet foods made in a kitchen over those made in a lab.
- Pet parents are focused on making healthy—not indulgent—choices.
- Far-out flavour innovation (ie chicken tandoori) is likely to flop.

EXPECTED BOOST FOR PET FOOD PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA

Animal Medicines Australia's *Pet Ownership in Australia 2016* Report shows the overall pet population in Australia has declined by 9% since 2013, mainly as a result of a drop in bird and fish numbers. Dog numbers were up by 3% and cats up by 6%.

How is the changing pet population affecting the growth of pet food production in the country? Euromonitor International's *Pet Care in Australia* report (May 2017) says pet humanisation is contributing to a shift towards more

premium products and smaller packaging, which in turn is driving growth in the value of pet food in 2017 by 2%, with the average unit price set to increase also by 2%.

This comes despite a slight drop in pet food volume in 2017, driven mainly by the decline in the pet population and by the changing preferences in the dog population, with Australians opting for smaller dogs which require smaller amounts of food, according to the report.

Euromonitor International also revealed consumer demand for premium products is expected to continue growing in Australia, with the explosion of even more niche and super premium products that will continue to support higher unit prices. This will be particularly evident in products like mixers and treats for dogs and cats - predicted to grow faster than the other pet food products - as pet owners look for options to enhance their pet's diet whilst treating them with healthy snacks.

'MINDFUL CHOICE' MOVEMENT AND OTHER TRENDS

Nowadays, because consumers are influenced by a more holistic approach and want healthy food choices for their pets, they expect pet food brands to have clean labels, full transparency on their ingredients lists and 100 per cent traceability.

A 2017 survey from Open Farm pet food in Canada examining what today's pet owners are looking for in feeding their companion animals revealed 9 out of 10 people say it's important that the pet food they purchase provides transparency of ingredients.

Furthermore, 84% of pet owners agree they pay as much attention to the ingredients that go into their pet's food as the ingredients their family eats, and 89% of pet owners agree it's important that the ingredients in their pet's food are ethically sourced.

Among trends currently impacting the pet food market are the preference for functional pet foods and diets with preventative benefits. The basic premise behind the preference for pet foods with ingredients like probiotics and omega-3 fatty acids is that - like their owners - pets also age, and these foods address specific health concerns such as

indigestion, dental or joint problems.

Therapeutic diets are also a great example of a way the industry continues to move forward, said Dr Mina Magelakis, Scientific Services Veterinarian for ROYAL CANIN®. Available from the vet by prescription, these foods are specific formulations to help in the management and treatment of diagnosed medical conditions, such as kidney disease, she explained.

"Published research shows that feeding the correct diet in these patients can be the single most important factor in improving their quality of life and prolonging their survival," said Dr Magelakis.

Also pushing the industry ahead is individualised nutrition for healthy cats and dogs.

"The formulation of breed-specific diets takes into account the kibble shape and texture to best suit the jaw shape of the cat or dog, and any nutrients that may be relevant to help manage medical conditions certain breeds may be predisposed to," said Dr Magelakis.

Some pet foods have a unique shape proven to slow down the consumption of food in a breed known to eat very quickly and have an insatiable appetite! (Yep, Labradors!)

Home delivery of veterinary or nutrition expert-developed pet foods is another trend fuelled by pet parents who increasingly prefer brands that deliver highly customised pet foods right to their front door. And with pet obesity being a major health concern, the demand for gluten-free, grain-free pet food is a major innovation driver in the global pet food industry, according to the *Global Dog and Cat Food Market 2018-2022* report.

Also becoming more popular is feeding a 'rotational diet' in order to provide pets a more complete and balanced diet, and to offer new flavours so animals don't build up an intolerance to one ingredient or protein⁴.

Pet parents are also increasingly seeking novel proteins, such as kangaroo, duck and lamb, which unfortunately is contributing to increasing instances of cat and dog allergies and consequently affecting the market, according to the *Global Dog and Cat Food Market* report.