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Cuisine de Critters

By Phil Tripp

All Treat Photography by Animax

Rather than having recipes for pet treats in a small Cuisine de Critters, I thought this issue—especially in these drought-ridden, economically-challenged times—should guide our loyal and smart readers over the changing landscape of where your pet treats come from. We're not going to deal with 'formulated' treats like bar products, extruded strips of mixed ingredients or biscuit style snacks. So we're leaving out 'health-sticks', 'chews' and multi-ingredient style snacks.

We're talking meaty bits from cows, pigs, roos, chickens, turkeys and lamb. We're looking at body parts that have been dried or smoked as well as fish and crustaceans that have been dehydrated. You see them bagged under private labels or multinational brands as well as heaped in containers that you can choose from dozens on open display.

When I was an early-times dog owner, the dancing dogs and catchy song of Schmackos on the TV lured me, but when I read the ingredients, I was horrified to discover the number of food colourings, preservatives and additives contained in the product. For example, what I thought was a box of beef hide actually was pressed formed hard strips made to look like a rawhide chewie. But it contained beef hide, chicken, chicken by-products, salt, modified starch, flavourings, preservatives, colourings and antioxidants.

As someone who stalled in the pet food aisle in the supermarket, I checked out what was available as pet treats for my beloved dog, looking at the variety of rawhide chews, pig ears, liver strips and other meat-based treats. Searching Woolworths online, there are over 120 items designated as pet treats.

There is a vast quantity of brands and styles that come and go—some proudly Australian-made, many of them appearing to be great value. When I did my maths on the pig snouts in small packages on the shelf, I thought my calculator had broken because they computed to be almost \$200 a kilo, since the 15 gram pack was \$3.15—comparable to the most expensive pate de foie gras from France. Bow Wow Pig Ears in a 20 gram bag were \$2.45 which was the same as imported Roquefort cheese at the deli at over \$122 a kilo.

In Coles, a 100 gram pack of two beefhide chews cost \$4.59 or \$46 a kilo while another pack of two small ground rawhide bones—which also contained rice, sugar, salt and preservatives and imported from Thailand priced at \$3.75 for 80 grams or \$46 a kilo. And they cost as much as prime fillet steak.

So I went the route that many of us take when confronted with highly marketed supermarket brands and decided to source pet treats from pet supply stores where there was a greater variety at an often lesser cost. And they appeared to be safe too and I hoped or presumed they were locally produced.



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Wrong again in some cases. I found out as I talked to a variety of pet treat producers and distributors that the basket of pigs ears, the open box of rawhide treats and the shimmering, gaudy shrink-wrapped bags of dried chicken were more likely to be imported from China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Bangladesh or the Philippines than sourced locally or nationally. And the more I delved into the smoked, dehydrated and dried pet treats made from meat, bones, fish and fowl, the scarier it became.

But in finding out the facts as well as how the market has dramatically changed over the past few years, I'm certain now that I am buying the freshest, best and least expensive products for my pet's health, enjoyment and as a way to cope with guilt when I see those begging eyes.

Let's name some of these to get an idea of the vast array of products that are available. Smoked bones of all species, necks, hocks, trotters, pizzles, jerky, sticks, chews, bites, cartilage, spines, spears, puffs, snags, sausages, hearts, tendons, tails, twists, clods, knot bones. Oinkers... the list goes on. And they can be made from beef, pork, chicken, turkey, roo, goat, camel, emu and any number of sea creatures. And yes, there are even sweet potato treats that are vegetarian.




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