UK pet food market now worth £2.8bn

THE pet food industry remains healthy with the value of pet food in 2014 growing by £10m to hit £2.8bn. Volume-wise, however, the total market saw a slight dip of 2% to 1,476,000 tonnes.

The figures were revealed in the annual report of the Pet Food Manufacturers Association, whose 67 member businesses account for more than 90% of the UK market. Its data is, therefore, based on actual production figures. The figures are consistent with falling pet ownership, the PFMA said.

Strong growth has been demonstrated in the dog and cat treats category. Dog treats showed growth of 5% in volume and 7% in value in 2014 to reach £95m. PFMA chief executive Michael Bellingham said: “The market in 2014 is twice as big as in 2002 in terms of value.”

Cat treats continued its double-digit growth with a 17% increase in value, and is nudging £230m. The dog food market saw a slight dip in volume to 390,000 tonnes, with 242m of dogs being fed wet, or 35% of dogs being fed dry, with 59% fed dry food.

In the cat food sector, volume has seen a dip of 2% to 405,000 tonnes. Multi-serve wet cat food saw the biggest drop of 7% in volume, down to 102,000 tonnes, while single-serve cat food continues to grow in favour among owners and registered a modest 1% rise in volume to reach 290,000 tonnes.

Value of the total cat food market remains constant at just over £1bn, which equates to spending approximately £130 on each cat per year. Wet food is the preferred food of owners, with 70% of cats being offered wet against 22% for dry food; the wet cat food sector is valued at £790m.

The small animal market has remained fairly consistent, with total volume for rabbits, guinea pigs and rodents hovering around the 75,000 tonnes figure. Value has seen a slight drop of about 2% to £73m. The rabbit category remains dominant with 53,000 tonnes, and is valued at £52m.

Other PFMA figures show the wild cat market is valued at £210 million (150,000 tonnes), caged and avairy birds has a value of £12m (13,000 tonnes), and fish is £72m (3,000 tonnes).

The PFMA says there has been a slight drop in volume of caged and avairy bird food of 2%, while value of sales fell by 4%, but this reflects the wider fall in pet population seen over the past two to three years. However, the PFMA notes that the relatively small size of the pet bird population means it is difficult to give a certain estimate.

Education is a key theme for the PFMA this year, and in addition to the pet food film, there will be monthly, pet-owning, fact-based sheets on pet food topics ranging from demystifying pet food labels to the ingredients used by industry.

The film, which is available to download at www.pfma.org.uk/factsheets/ is entitled Understanding Pet Food Labels and includes explanations of ‘complete’ and ‘complementary’ pet foods, and a definition of ‘meat and animal derivatives’.

Other strategies aimed at giving people confidence in prepared pet food include hosting workshops and discussions, its Pet Size-O-Meter, and providing educational posters and leaflets for display in shops and vet practices.

CONFIDENCE

The PFMA initiative comes within the context of a recent survey of 2,100 pet owners and 150 veterinary professionals, which indicated a high level of confidence in the pet food industry. According to the survey, conducted by the PFMA, 70% of owners and 85% of vets agree that commonly prepared pet food provides optimum nutrition, and nearly 60% of owners and 95% of vets say that pets are living longer as a result of advances in nutrition.

However, 85% of vets think it’s important that there is more education on feeding correctly, and 73% of vets believe obesity is getting worse.

The consumer research also confirmed that owners are confident that there are strict rules and regulations governing the industry (98%).

Nicole said: “Despite this confidence, there is a gap between expert knowledge and pet owner perceptions. Our research at the London Vet Show confirmed some stubborn myths and misconceptions about the industry and some areas we are keen to address.

“Top queries to pet food company care lines include questions on pet food labels, particularly understanding the terminology used including categories such as ‘meat and animal derivatives’.

At the PFMA’s recent annual seminar, the subject of some of these myths was explored further in a question and answer session. One area of confusion for some pet owners concerns the meat used in pet food, and whether it is ‘something I would eat myself’. To the amusement of the audience, vet Dr Marge Chandler, who is also a board-certified veterinary nutritionist, pointed out that a person’s dinner could easily be considered another’s by-product, as it happens. Better still, it is only responsible to use so much of a slaughtered animal as possible (the liver and tripe).”

Holistic vet Dr Nick Thompson added that for dogs and cats, eating as broadly as possible, including the viscera and “just slightly parts of an animal”, was a healthy option.

Raw feeding became the subject of spiritual discussion, in part due to a blurring of lines between an understanding of a home-prepared raw food diet and commercially prepared frozen raw food.

Nicole added: “We are keen to do more to raise owner confidence even further. Pet care professionals are at the forefront, answering questions, and throughout 2015, we will be working to ensure they have all the tools and resources they need to do this. In addition to sharing facts and information, PFMA will be participating in discussions on pet nutrition and pet food matters, hosting seminars at key events around the country.”