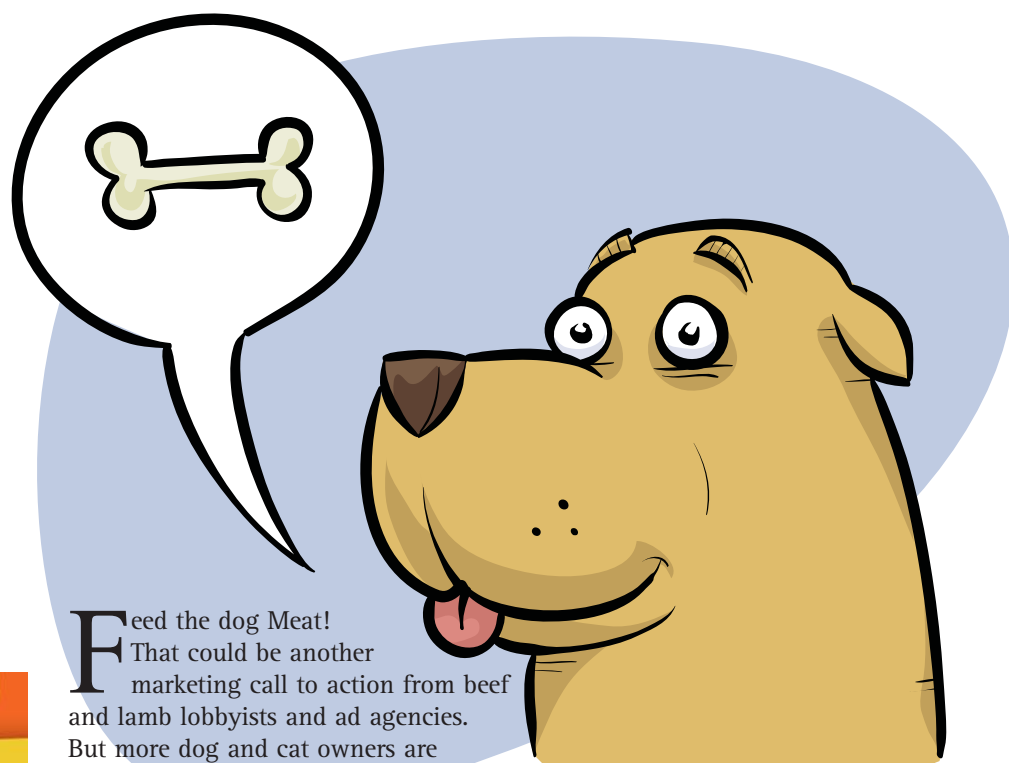


# Cuisine Critters *de*

By Pet Chef Phil Tripp



**F**eed the dog Meat! That could be another marketing call to action from beef and lamb lobbyists and ad agencies. But more dog and cat owners are partaking in a new feeding concept of 'whole food' for their animals by adding raw food in the form of whole defeathered chickens and whole fish to dogs as well as whole fish and commercially grown rodents to their cats. And of course there are those adherents to raw and meaty bones or BARF (bones and raw food).

We're going to get a little messy here so time to pull out the rubber gloves and find the cover to the dog or cat door to keep all the grizzly action on the outside of the house. It's a back to nature call.

I know it sounds bizarre. We're not talking turning your pet into a prey eater or making this a sole diet. The experience can be a bit overwhelming when your hound tackles a whole chicken carcass in the backyard and demolishes it from toes to beak. And while cats take to whole fish very easily, dogs often have to get used to it by starting with small quantities. So it's about whole food as a part of the diet, not the whole enchilada.

The logic of the raw food adherents is that when animals eat prey in the wild, they generally consume the whole carcass including the digestive tract, heart, lungs, glands, tendons and blood as well as softer bones. Though the theory is that wolves get their vegetables from the stomach contents of their prey, it's not proven. Matter of fact, zookeepers can attest that most carnivores pass up the intestinal contents. But we're talking dogs and cats here, not wolves and lions—our wildlife has been domesticated—though the urge to tear apart a prey animal is not bred out.

And hey, I'm not advocating that you try and bring back the soul of the bush to Fido by making him catch and kill his own possum in the back yard. Nor the rescue greyhound chasing a rabbit around the barbecue and patio furniture til it's caught.

Let's start with what you can feed as a raw prey meal. Chicken is easy, it already comes either whole or in pieces. A whole rabbit, defurred is a low fat, high bone-factor meal. The same applies to duck, but that's getting pricey. It certainly brings back the call of the wild.

For small dogs, chicken wings and necks are the obvious choice as they can easily gnaw through the bones and flesh with ease—great for their teeth and a natural meal. But they could just as easily be fed a quail or spatchcock, while medium dogs can be given a half chicken and large dogs a whole chook to tear through. Perhaps that Great Dane could do the turkey!

Supervising the feeding is essential, especially for animals that are 'scarfers' or that traditionally eat food that can be swallowed easily. Best to start them off on raw meaty large bones so they can learn to chew and pace themselves or hand feed them chunks of fish first. Most dogs will learn eventually, even the greedy guts. Raw food gives them a chance to savour their meal and have to work for it rather than a bowl of kibbles or can of meat that can be woofed down.

Bringing up the concept of Fido crunching into a salmon head and fanging the eyeballs may make you squeamish but it's good nutrition as well as a tooth cleaner. You can feed whole uncooked fish to dogs and cats, just be careful with size and also supervise the meal. A half kilo fish is generally fine for a meal. Cats love sardines whole as well as other small fish. No need to have them gutted and the bones, as long as uncooked, are not an issue.

Blackfish, mullet, whiting, redfish, mackerel, trout and cheaper fish are easy options with heads and tails intact. I'd stay away from the large sharp boned fish, but shark is fine, especially since it has so much cartilage. You'll find whole fish in many cases cheaper than the cost of whole meat dog food and as a weekly special meal or twice a week, it will do wonders for their coat.

You must realise that dogs really do not have the digestive system to handle the amount of grain products that are used as filler in most commercial dog foods. Grains are one of the biggest sources of allergies in dogs and cats too. You would want to source food that is as natural and organic as possible—with fish, that's pretty simple but with poultry, lamb and beef, free range is far better than feedlot. And don't forget the eggs, they can be fed to dogs and cats with the shell for calcium.

You can work your way up the food chain too. The one part of the tuna that always gets thrown away is the tail followed by the backbone, while fish heads make for a challenging feast. It might make for an odd encounter but can you imagine two Schnauzers working on an octopus. Or a cat demolishing a squid?

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If you talk to your fishmonger or go to the fish market, they're easy to source. And as for choosing the right body parts for the hound, you'd be amazed what a great source of knowledge your local butcher is, most own pets themselves. I don't advocate tossing a goat head in the backyard as your neighbours might start to wonder, but butchers can be the source of creative off cuts as well as offal advice.

I remember once trading some services for a deer from a client who happened to raise them. After having the prime venison cuts wrapped for freezing, I also had the off cuts packed on the bone where possible for our dog to consume whole. Though we could have had the liver, kidneys and tripe as well from the butcher, this was a bit daunting and they would have to have been consumed too quickly. For their size, they were too rich to feed raw and unfrozen before going off.

However the hit of the deal turned out to be the hooves and horns. While the horns were small and undeveloped, they were still a crunchy treat for Mick. But what came out looking totally bizarre was Mick taking the shank of the near half metre hoof and working his way down. It looked like a sensational tabloid shot of the dog with five legs, one growing from its head.

Mick also had a habit of hunting eels as we found out accidentally when he entered one of the ponds at Centennial Park. There was not much we could do once he hit the water and there were plenty of squiggling targets, but they actually got the better of him and he retreated rapidly after getting a few nips on the leg. After that, he only pursued small schools of fish at the beach.

What about our birds you ask? We've tried mealworms, crickets and once put a lab bred cockroach in the bowl, but they prefer tearing up fruit. With mangoes, cherries and berries in season, they'll take that over any raw meal. But they still love that cooked organic chicken bone or well cooked end of fillet steak!

See the Internet Interpet on page 27 for raw food sites and other links to pet food nutrition.

<http://www.rawlearning.com> An interesting Australia site on raw food with a broad range of links to other information resources.

<http://www.dogaware.com/dogfeeding.html> A source of advice on canned foods, dried foods and selecting commercial foods as well as supplements, adding fresh foods to a commercial diet and even raw food co-ops and local groups can be found at Dog Feeding Info.

<http://cats.about.com/cs/nutrition/a/rawfooddiet.htm> &

<http://cats.about.com/cs/catfood/a/bybrawdets.htm> A more limited site for cats.

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/rawfeeding> Raw feeding for dogs and cats forum hits an average of 2000 posts a month on the topic covering all breeds of dogs as well as working, coursing, show dogs and of course cats of all types.

See the recipe for K9 Kooler & Kitty Kookies on page 10.

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