



The art of sourcing ingredients with a health claim

Pet product manufacturers are increasingly looking for reliability, security of supply and value in the sourcing of health-claim ingredients. How do leading ingredients manufacturers provide for these needs?

Growing demand

Formulating pet products with ingredients that have a certified health claim can add significant value. The growing demand for products with added benefits to health in the pet market mirrors the trend in human products. However, sourcing ingredients with this kind of functionality is not always straightforward. Pet product manufacturers are increasingly looking for reliability, security of supply and value in the sourcing of health-claim ingredients.

Need for certification of health claims

Food manufacturers must show there is scientific proof for any health claim. Regulatory authorities in the food sector in the EU and the US certify the health properties

of ingredients. In Europe, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is responsible for assessing health claims, using a panel of experts in the field, who review data provided by the manufacturer. In the US, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) carries out the equivalent work. Once approved, the ingredient's official health claim is published on the relevant regulatory authorities' official listings and announced in trade media.

Rigorous research

The whole field of health claims for ingredients is relatively recent. The process of gaining certification requires a great deal of research, and often several years before a health claim is approved by the regulatory authorities.

Some suppliers, like Barentz, a leading global distributor of life science ingredients, work together with academic institutes, including universities, to boost their own technical research capabilities. They also work closely with their own customers through research partnerships.

“While there is a significant move towards using ingredients that have health claims within the pet sector, there is a long process involved in acquiring certification for health claims,” said Tim Lemeer, Vice President of Animal Nutrition at Barentz. “Companies that are research-based lead in getting health claims approved for appropriate ingredients.”

Ensuring quality

The quality of studies into the properties of ingredients can vary enormously. Research from good academic institutes and published studies in reputable scientific journals are good indications of quality research.

The research used to get a health claim approved also encompasses many trials that substantiate the claims made. “After a health claim has been approved it is still not a ‘done deal’,” explained Tim. “The production processes and the health claim certificates are audited, both independently and by the pet food producers, to make sure that all measures are satisfied. All-in-all, a very long road must be taken, in order to ensure the quality and integrity of the ingredients that hold the health claim.”

“Also, every formulation and combination of ingredients uniquely targets the required functionality or health benefits,” he added. “There can be many synergies between ingredients that offer health benefits in combination, but the uniqueness of each formulation makes it difficult to formally certify a claim on those. This is because considering the research

“The uniqueness of each formulation makes it difficult to put a claim on combinations of some ingredients”

required, it would not be cost-effective to do so, compared to the profits from a single formulation.”

The challenge of natural variability

Another significant current trend in the pet market is a preference for natural ingredients. However, due to the variability of natural ingredients by default, obtaining a proven health claim, as well as security of supply, can be more difficult.

“Synthesised production of ingredients can enable more reproducible results and better quality control, but this contradicts the trend towards natural solutions,” remarked Tim. “Aligning the long time that health claim registration and getting natural products into successful formulations takes, versus the usually more volatile nature (and, thus, short-term) of trends in pet food, poses a challenge. Successfully balancing your investments versus the uncertain future benefits of trends is essential. That is the biggest challenge in my opinion.”

The pay-off

There is no doubt that making a health claim on a product is a challenging and rigorous process, encompassing a number of complex issues. But the pay-off, once a health claim is approved, can be worthwhile. It is increasingly a factor in the equation for a successful and profitable pet product for many manufacturers. ♦



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