

**PET FOOD INGREDIENTS**

# Pet Food And Rendering Plants

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## **Pet Food and Rendering Plants**

**by Jerry E.**

First let me introduce myself. I am a retired Certified Pest Control Operator. I was certified in three states. I have an associate degree in entomology, food grade warehouse management, and several courses in sanitation. I serviced and advised large national meatpacking plants, other food manufacturing plants, feed mills, and pet food plants. I worked closely with the USDA inspectors and quality control departments of several plants including the pet food plants. The largest pet food plant manufactured pet food for 65 different companies and took up a majority of my time the last few years of my business.

My first experience with rendering plants were those that were in the tail end of the meatpacking plants. They were good clean rendering plants, if there is such a thing. The only thing they rendered was the waste from the cattle they processed. There was never any outside product brought in. The rendering plant was separated from the main plant by a concrete wall. The components to be rendered were augured in from the main plant and ground into small pieces, then put in a cooker and heated at 280 degrees for approximately an hour, usually a little

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more. The cooking eliminated the moisture, and then the product was run through a screening process that separated the product into bone meal, protein meal and larger bone fragments and fat. Very little of this product went to pet food manufactures.

My first experience with an independent rendering plant that rendered product for pet food was totally shocking. I suppose I was partially prepared for it by the meatpacking plants, but this was still shocking. At any rate the local plant called me because they were expecting a corporate representative to come in the following month, and they had a horrendous rat problem. They wanted to show corporate that they had the problem under control. I am going to try to remember this plant in detail to give you an idea of what goes into our pet foods. That is not to say that they are all this way, but this is a general example that I ran into more often than I would have expected.

The plant was out in the middle of an open field and except for a 15 foot parameter around the building the weeds were waist to neck high. I entered the plant on a dirt drive that went up to a concrete parking slab in the front of the building; in front of the office door an a large overhead door.

The dirt drive went around one side of the building to the back where there was a concrete dump area with an overhead door going into the building. The concrete slab was sloped away from the building with a curb on both sides so that they could wash down the area. This is where the dead animals, parts and pieces of animals and other things to be rendered or processed were dumped. Between the dirt drive area and the building was junk parts and equipment piled up that obviously housed a large colony of rats as you could see their trails in and out of the junk piles. The other dumping ground for machine parts, etc. out back was also full of rats. The concrete pad in the back where the trucks dumped their loads had rat holes lining the curb that ran along the sides.

As you might imagine, this area was loaded with flies; the piles of products were alive with maggots. It made it look like the whole pile of product was alive and moving. After the loads were dumped they were picked up by a bobcat (a miniature loader with a scoop on the front) and hauled inside the plant to the rendering pit. The plant had three undocumented workers doing the labor, including running the bobcat. The pit was a concrete hole with sloped sides that was about 8 to 10 feet deep and it

had four sides that were about 7 feet long. There was a small seam 1 inch wide about 4 feet down that ran all the way around the pit. This seam, as the ones in the corners, had several rat holes in them, so rats were living in the rendering pit.

At the bottom of the pit was an auger grinder that ground the product and augured it out to a bin to be cooked. The cooker was in the back corner of the plant that took up about one third of the building. After it was cooked, it was pressed to eliminate the remaining moisture. Then it was separated into different products and shipped off to one of their other plants to be further processed and packaged. I asked where the finish products were sent to; they said it was shipped to several different pet food plants. It seems the corporation had several rendering plants and contracts with numerous pet food plants. Not only were dead animals that died who knows how being rendered, but also live rats, a lot of rat droppings plus all the dirt and concrete fragments that were removed from the rat holes in the pit and piles of maggots. But 'that was ok' because it was just going for pet food. What they were concerned about was the constant maintenance that the rats were causing by digging holes in the concrete and

chewing through hoses and electric lines.

Maintenance expenses were getting too high and something had to be done.

That is why they called me. It took a couple of months, and several buckets of dead rats, but I did take care of their rat problem. In the mean time I found out where a lot of the dead animals and other scraps and pieces came from.

There were dead cows, pigs, horses, chickens, various road kill, packaged meat from local supermarkets and waste from restaurants and fast food places. The most sickening thing that I saw was trucks that came from chicken farms; I call them chicken prisons that were supposedly full of dead chickens. When they dumped, 90% of the chickens were dead, however there was always a few that were still alive, if you could call that alive. They were mostly featherless and staggering around obviously sick and dying. They picked them up and threw them into the pit alive to be ground up with the rest of the dump. Most of the cattle from feed lots and farmers had plastic ear tags impregnated with Dursban or other insecticides that were placed there to ward off flies. These tags were not removed, they were ground up with the cattle and the plastic and Styrofoam containers that spoiled and rotten meat

from the supermarkets came in. When I asked about the ear tags and the plastic and Styrofoam they said that they could not afford to pay someone to remove them or un-package the spoiled meats from the supermarkets. “Besides, they would be eliminated from the end product through the rendering process.”

The cattle from the feed lots were full of antibiotics and hormones; they are given these antibiotics and hormones in the feed that they ate. They are added at the feed mill in the feed lots. Feed lots keep records of such additives for the government inspectors that never show up, or if they do it would only be about once a year. If for some reason the cattle contract some illness in spite of the added antibiotics they receive more antibiotics from the veterinarians that work for the feed lot. If the cattle die even after all of that, they go to the rendering plant. And guess what! The rendering plant operators don't care why they died of or what kind of drugs were pumped into them.

“After all, it is just going into pet food, and some of it will be sold to feed mills and go into cattle feed or other feed. People won't be eating it.” Fact of the matter is that people do end up eating it too. Poorer people that are barely getting by will buy canned dog food to

eat because it is cheap. That bit of information came from the quality control department of a nationally known pet food manufacture that insisted that their canned product be fit for human consumption. Of course theirs was not a cheaper brand.

The point of this is that when you see meat byproducts listed on the label of your pet food, this could be what you could be feeding your pet. So when you see this on the label I would encourage you to think twice about purchasing the product.

My thanks to Jerry E. for sharing his real life story.