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Authored by:

**Sandip V. Madkaikar, Assistant Professor**

From

**VM Salgaocar Institute of International  
Hospitality Education, Goa**

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# Perception of Pet Parents Towards the Concept of Fresh Food for Dogs

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## **Perception of Pet Parents Towards the Concept of Fresh Food for Dogs**

**Author 1** :Santosh Malkoti, Assistant Professor, Chitkara School of Hospitality, Chitkara University, Punjab.

**Author 2** :Sandip V. Madkaikar, Assistant Professor, VM Salgaocar Institute of International Hospitality Education, Goa.

**Author 3** :Ravi Dandotiya, Research scholar, Chitkara Business School, Chitkara University, Punjab.

### **ABSTRACT**

Since there is a notable upsurge in the number of pet parents and which includes plenty of first-time pet parents, who are commonly unaware of the appropriate eating patterns of their companion pets. And this may result in the critical health concerns to their pets which can be easily dodged if they get to know about the nutritional needs of their pet. The motive of the study was to collect the response of the pet parent (of dogs) towards the fresh food for pets (dogs). The concept of FFD (Fresh Food for Dogs) is that the food is prepared fresh, considering the dietary requirements of the pet in a hygienic manner using the best quality ingredients that are free from toxic chemicals. Feedback gathered from the pet (dog) owners concerning the FFD utilizing a questionnaire that incorporated principal elements like the value of pet at home, feeding practices, acceptability of FFD, and recommendations. The data collected through the questionnaire was transformed into numerical values for a better understanding of the recorded responses. The investigation revealed that pet owners had a certain familiarity with the nutritive dietary requirement of the pet but had extremely

restricted alternatives available with them to feed their pet either homemade food for humans or packaged food. There was a pleasant response obtained from the participants involved in the survey regarding the concept of FFD. The research can be utilized by the practitioners for the formulation of FFD in an effective & efficient way to make their venture a success. And it can be adopted as a basis for further studies based on pet food development.

**KEYWORDS:** Pet ownership & animal care, Parent-pet relationship, Pet food habits, FFD

## INTRODUCTION

Human companion - canine familiaris has been domesticated since time immemorial, not only for safety reasons but it has become a trend to keep pets. And the acceptance of dogs as human companion is because they have distinctive remedial potential which has a positive impact on human health (Levinson, 1964; Friedmann et al., 1980; Allen et al., 1991; Serpell, 1991). The number of pet parents has been increasing. Due to the reduction in the number of family components in industrialized countries the role of pet such as dogs and cats as family members have gained increasing importance (Shepherd, 2008) and their health and wellbeing have become a prominent challenge for the owners (Buchanan et al., 2011) The increased popularity of keeping a dog as a pet has earned the dog a right to health (Haraway, 2008).

Unawareness among pet parents regarding food suitable for their pet dog has resulted in short lives of dogs, hence the loss affects pet parents on an emotional front. Due to attractive packaging and advertising of commercial food for dogs, pet parents blindly trust and feed their pets with such processed food without knowing how the product is made and what contents are used in the product. Studies have shown that packaged food is not good for your pet in the long run as it has cancer-causing chemicals such as mycotoxin and aflatoxin (Leung et al 2006; Akinrinmade et al., 2012). Aflatoxin is also a cause for enlarged livers in dogs (Newman et al, 2007). At present there are abundance of pet foods brands available in market. However, many of them are prone to get contaminated because of Salmonella and other bacteria. (Freeman, 2013). The additives & preservatives used in packaged food for pets may be a leading cause for detrimental of their vital internal organs (Martin, 2011).

It is unethical and unhealthy to feed your pet dog with food prepared for humans, leftover food or table scraps (Kelly, 2012). In the early 1960s, the Manufacturers Committee of the National Pet Association chairman complained, "Our biggest competitor is still table

scraps” (Anreder, 1962, p.3). This was a common practice in the recent past as it saved wastage of food.

In many parts of the world parts of the world pets are fed with food scraps rather than food specially prepared for them or packaged food which can meet their nutritional needs (Steiff, 2001). Dogs have a different nutritive requirement according their age or life stages (NRC, 2006) and a different digestive system as compared to humans, hence dogs have to be fed with food which is suitable and beneficial for their growth and wellbeing.

Dog food needs to have a balanced proportion of nutrients like proteins, carbohydrates, and minerals and its requirement varies according to the age and activity of the pet. Grain is a necessary dietary ingredient for a dog, but in low amounts, and protein should be within the limits (National Research Council, U.S., 1985). The role of functional food plays a vital role in pet’s (dog’s) well being as it has the properties of clinical benefits (Di Cerbo, 2014).

It has been found in research studies that pet illness and cost of pet maintenance are one of the major cause of pet dog abandonment (Herb, 2010 ; Mussa & Prola, 2005). Premium pet foods have a composition of well balanced ingredients and nutritional formula, but are more expensive. Whereas the cheaper quality generally meet the nutritional needs but contain undesirable elements like artificial colours and additives which may lead to physical complications in the pet (Dog Health Nutrition, SPCA). As the previous studies has stated that the market for “chef-inspired” pet foods has vast potential of growth (Grimes, 2012). According to the National Research Council, protein should be added to the diet of pet dogs within in the prescribed limits. Most of pet parent include grains in pet food which is essential, but it has to be in lesser amounts (Souliere, 2014).

Fresh food for dogs (FFD) is a solution for the well being of the pet as it is prepared considering the nutritional requirements of dogs. This Concept of feeding dogs with FFD needs to be introduced to pet parents as it is beneficial for the health and well being of dogs.

The authors in the current study wants to explore the perception of pet parents towards the concept of fresh food for pets which will be customized and delivered according to the pet's requirement.

### **CONCEPT OF FRESH FOOD FOR DOGS (FFD)**

FFD is freshly cooked food for pet dogs using a combination of fresh ingredients like meat (chicken/fish), grain (rice/corn/wheat/oats), and vegetables (carrot/potato/beetroot) in a proportion of 30:35:35 respectively (Colliard et al., 2006; Knight & Leitsberger, 2016) which is healthy and easily digestible by the dog. Food is prepared hygienically and served within 4 hours, it does not contain any adulterant/additive or preservative. As the basic components of FFD are enriched in antioxidants, thus making it suitable for the adequate physical growth of the dog and also helps in the treatment of behavioural disturbance in them (Di Cerbo, 2017). The ingredients of FFD are cooked which reduces the growth of pathogens & make it safe for consumption (Freeman, 2013).

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To analyze the importance of the concept of fresh food for dogs (FFD).
2. To understand the perception of pet parents towards feeding pet dogs with FFD.
3. To identify variables which refrain pet owners to opt for the concept of FFD.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To study the perception of pet parents towards the concept of FFD, primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The study was conducted in Chandigarh city which has a remarkable number of pet owners. The purpose was to determine the feasibility and

acceptability of the concept of FFD in Chandigarh. The study was conducted by surveying 132 pet owners in Chandigarh.

### **Data Collection and Selection of the Participants**

To collect data a structured questionnaire was formulated and which was then circulated to the pet (dog) owners using email, and in person. Participants were asked to answer all the questions.

### **Instrument development**

The survey comprised 12 questions, including multiple-choice questions and descriptive questions (Table 1) adapted from the study of Russo et al., (2017). The questions covered the following themes: pet ownership & animal care, parent-pet relationship, pet food habits and health risks linked to pets. This questionnaire was circulated within pet parents in Chandigarh, Punjab, through email and in person.



**Table 1. Survey to study the perception of pet parents towards FFD**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1. How long have you been a PET PARENT of pet(s) mentioned above? (Pet Parent = individual who pays for the majority of dog-related expenses and cares for the well being of a dog(s)).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year                      <input type="checkbox"/> Between 1 to 5 years</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 5 years</p>  | <p>7. Are you aware of the concept of freshly prepared food for the dog?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes    <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>  |
| <p>2. How would you describe your dog's primary role in your household?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Family member                      <input type="checkbox"/> Guard dog</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> House pet                                      <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p>   | <p>8. What is your opinion about FFD?</p> <p>Briefly explain</p>   |
| <p>3. Kindly rate the following attributes according to their importance while selecting food for your pet.</p> <p>1 = least important                      5 = very important</p> <p>a. Affordable                      1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>b. Availability                      1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>c. My dog likes it                      1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>d. Healthy                      1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>e. Grain-free/ low-grain                      1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>f. Veterinarian recommend                      1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> | <p>9. Rank your perception of FFD in terms of the following :</p> <p>1 = least preferred                      5 = most preferred</p> <p>a. Food modifications to your pet's requirement</p> <p>1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>b. Delivery of FFD to your doorstep</p> <p>1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>c. Take away from an outlet</p> <p>1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>d. Order can be placed over the phone</p> <p>1      2      3      4<br/>5</p> <p>e. Virtual menu available online</p> <p>1      2      3      4</p> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | 5<br>f. App for FFD on your mobile<br>1 2 3 4<br>5                  |
| 4. How does your dog's diet impact his or her well-being?<br><input type="checkbox"/> No impact <input type="checkbox"/> Very little impact<br><input type="checkbox"/> Some impact <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate impact<br><input type="checkbox"/> Significant impact | 10. How frequently will you prefer purchasing FFD to feed your pet? |
| 5. How many times a year do you visit the veterinarian?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Once <input type="checkbox"/> Twice<br><input type="checkbox"/> Three times or more <input type="checkbox"/> Never  | 11. Do you think this concept will benefit your dog?                |
| 6. Do you consult your veterinarian regarding suitable food for your pet?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____  | 12. Suggestions regarding the Concept of FFD.                       |

Source: Russo et al., (2017)

### Analysis

A descriptive statistic has been proposed for this study. The answers were tabulated and analyzed using Google Docs., and results were expressed as percentages. There were a lot of suggestions given by pet parents towards Fresh Food for Dogs (FFD). Also, the frequency of purchase of the product was recorded in percentage through 132 pet owners.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 226 questionnaires were sent to pet parents in Chandigarh, Punjab, through email, out of which 132 pet parents completed the survey. A descriptive statistic analysis has been performed, the responses have been calculated through Microsoft programme (Microsoft

Excel, 2010) and the results are expressed in percentage. Through the survey, it is observed that pet parenting has been a trend in Chandigarh and Punjab since there is an increase in the number of pet parents in the last five years. Many have adopted a pet dog for a year and this analysis suggests that there is a huge scope to make new pet parents aware of the benefits of FFD. This will help them to ensure a safe and healthy diet for their beloved pet. Those owning a pet since the last 5 years could use FFD and study the change in their pet's health and well being. Pet parents with a pet for more than 5 years are much more experienced in terms of pet parenting and would be the best critique towards FFD. Table 2 shows the percentage of participants that own a pet for less than a year until more than 5 years.

**Table 2. Owner of a pet dog in years**

| <b>Number of years as a pet parent</b> | <b>Results in percentage</b> |
|--|------------------------------|
| Less than 1 year                       | 43.1%                        |
| Last 5 years                           | 46.2%                        |
| More than 5 years                      | 10.8%                        |

Source: Authors compilation

It was surprising to see a huge number of pet parents considering their dog as a family member. The pet dogs are considered as a part of the family and there is a lot of emotional connection between the pet and the owner. Extreme care in terms of grooming, cleanliness, food, and health is taken as the pet is an important part of the owner's life. 16.9% of the pet owners considered their dog as a house pet giving them the same attention as a close and dear one. However, 4.6% of the participants considered their pet as a guard dog to keep strangers and trespassers at bay.

It was found that more than 50 % fed their dogs with food prepared for the family and more than 40 % fed their pet with packaged food, which is not a good practice. It was sad to

know that there are still people who feed their pets with table scraps. Pets are treated as family member and yet the requirement of the pet is misunderstood. The perception that since it's a family member it eats what is cooked for the family is completely wrong. The digestive system of the dog is not like ours. Hence it requires a completely different diet. FFD is the most suitable product that a pet requires for a healthy life. The results suggest that there is a big market for the product.

In every family, the well being of its members is always a priority. Health issues are dealt with seriously and the doctor is always consulted to recover fast. In the case of pets, there is a high chance of any disease that could be communicable and could affect other members of the family. As pets cannot speak, it becomes difficult to know about their well being. It is only when the pet stops eating or drinking we sense that it's feeling uneasy and requires medical attention. When asked pet parents as to how often they visit the veterinary doctor, the results were very pleasant. A maximum number of pet parents consulted their vet for any health-related issues at least once, or more in a year. However, 13.1% never visited a vet for any health-related issue. For the rest of the pet parents, since the veterinary doctor is one point of contact with health-related issues, the veterinary doctors should be more aware of FFD and its benefits for the pet dog. They should be the ones who should suggest pet parents about the product and should encourage FFD as it comes with a lot of health benefits.

The major factors or attributes that contribute towards the selection of food for the pets are whether it is : (i) Affordable (ii) Available (iii) Liked by the pet (iv) Healthy (v) Recommended by the veterinary. Out of these attributes 40.1% agreed that it should be easily available, 33.3% agreed that it depends on the dog's liking, 33.6% strongly agreed that health is a major concern for them while the selection of food for their pet. Whereas, 32.2% had a neutral opinion about affordability being a factor in the selection of food for their pet.

When asked whether their pet had suffered from any kind of disease due to the consumption of food, 77.7% said No, 12.3% were not sure and 10% said yes their pet suffered from a disease due to the consumption of wrong food, which suggests that health of a pet could be affected by consuming food which is not meant for them. A striking 80% of the participants were aware of freshly prepared food for dogs, out of which 72.8% want to avail FFD for their pet.

Certain parameters were set to understand the perception of pet owners towards FFD.

1. Modification of food as per their pet's requirement: 33.8% had a neutral opinion and 44% agreed that this should be an important factor towards FFD.
2. Delivery of FFD at doorstep: 45.6% agreed that this facility shall make it easy to avail FFD at their doorstep as this would save time and efforts in procuring the product.
3. Take away from outlet: 43.5% would like to avail of this facility and 35.18% had a very neutral opinion about the same.
4. Order placed over the phone: 44.6% would prefer to place orders over the phone and avail a delivery or pick up from the outlet.
5. Virtual menu online: 18.91% strongly believed that virtual menus shall be helpful to visualize the food prior ordering, 30.6% agreed with the same as this would help them check upon the ingredients used and its nutritional value before ordering.
6. Mobile app: This is the most important parameter to which 21.42% very strongly agreed to this feature as it has ease of operation and is accessible at all times. 29.46% also agreed as it has all the above-mentioned parameters and a feature of making a payment. Whereas, 25.89% had a very neutral opinion about the use of a mobile app for FFD.

Perception of pet parents towards FFD and the frequency of its purchase revealed that 24.24% of the participants would like to purchase FFD on daily basis, 25.75% weekly, 30.30% would like to purchase it on monthly basis, whereas 12.12% said no to this product. However, 7.59% would like to consider the cost, the veterinarian's opinion before making a purchase. The suggestions towards the concept of FFD by the pet owners were very positive and 97.06% of the participants mentioned FFD as a great concept, a very good initiative for feeding our dogs with the right kind of food suitable for its overall well-being.

Some of the suggestions given by pet parents towards FFD are as follows:

*“The popularity of FFD will also depend upon the awareness among pet owners, the pricing of the product, and the fulfillment of the customer's requirement.”*

*“Some suggested that food quality is more important than the price.”*

*“Nothing as such, but healthy food can be prepared at home also and that too nutritious.”*

*“Fresh food is far better than packaged food for the pets.”*

*“Menu should be according to the breed of the pet dog.”*

*“Should be available at an affordable price.”*

*“It's good as you can alter the nutrient requirement according to the dog's need.”*

## **CONCLUSION**

In the past years, there has been a consistent increase in pet parents and they consider their pet dog as a family member. There is a scope of educating these new pet parents in regards to food best suited for their pet dogs. The majority of them depend on the veterinary's opinion for a suitable diet for their pet (Harrison, 2006). From the findings of current study it is shown that the perception of pet parents towards the concept of fresh food for dogs is that

this food is a healthier option for their dogs provided it is available in the market at a reasonable price and has to be prepared hygienically. A majority of pet parents are aware of diseases caused to the pet due to improper food, presence of preservatives and imbalance in nutrients in the long run (Russo et al., 2017). However, there is a scope to educate the pet parents about the dietary requirements of the pet dogs. The concept of FFD can be popularized with the help of veterinary doctors, as a majority of pet parents in Chandigarh consult them for the right food for their pets. The concept has to be implemented in such a way that it is easily available to the end-user in a consistent manner. The findings of study could be useful for the pet dog owners and FFD providers in many ways. There is good value for researchers to understand the pet owners. Future studies can increase the sample size and can emphasize on a particular aspect.

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