

## PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

September 4, 2024

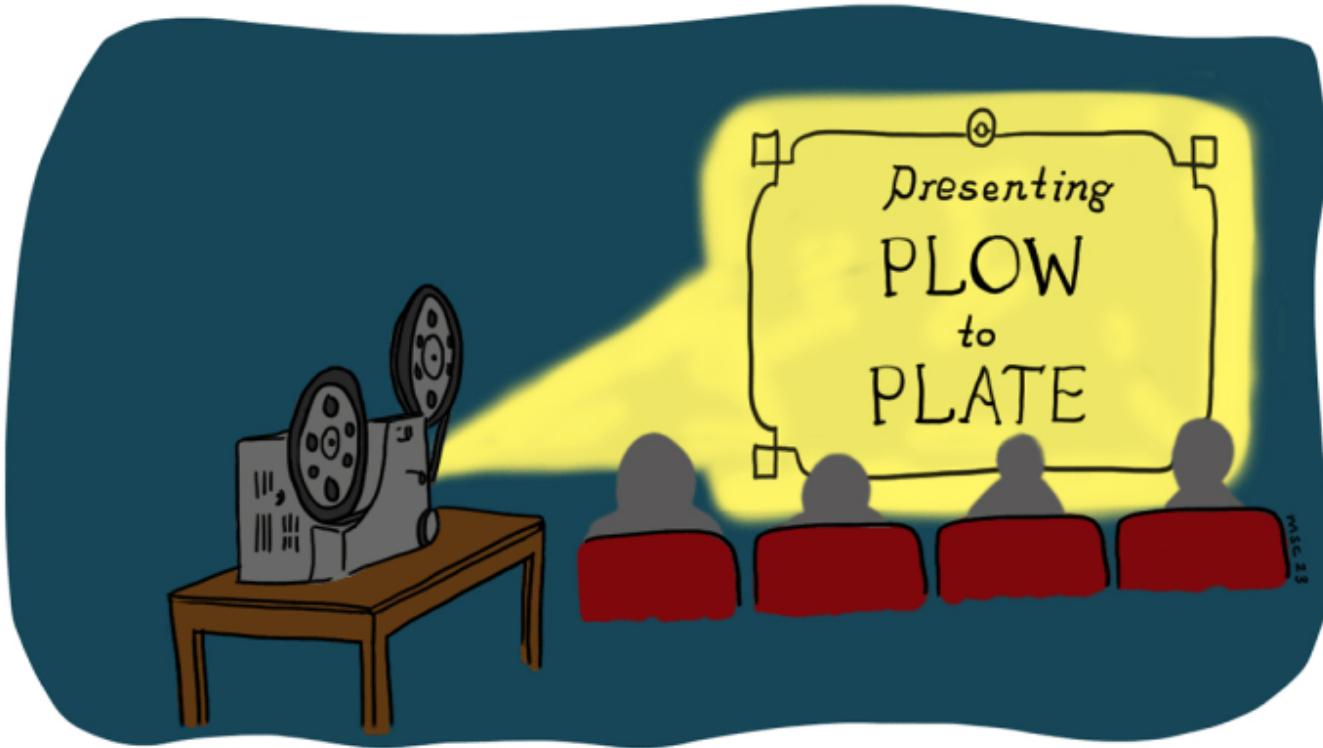


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

## PET FOOLED: THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT THE PET FOOD INDUSTRY

By Adam Rabiner

September 4, 2024

Let's just say that the documentary *Pet Fooled* is brought to you by *Plow to Bowl* rather than *Plow to Plate*. Never in our long-running series have we presented a film on what we feed our pets, although we have discussed whether cows are grass or grain fed. Yet *Pet Fooled* builds on the series' commitment to unveiling the less than savory aspects of an industrialized, corporatized and profit-driven food system. What plagues the pet food industry are the same problems that bedevil the system designed for our eating—namely, false and misleading packaging, monopoly power and

consolidation, weak or non-existent regulation and a focus on profits over health.

It's really not shocking therefore to learn that our pets suffer from many of the same maladies that we do: obesity, allergies, autoimmune issues and diseases such as diabetes. The main reason for this is that many of the pet food formulations are not biologically appropriate. Dogs and cats are carnivores. A cat's favorite meal is a freshly killed mouse. And dogs evolved from meat-eating wolves. In fact, every animal has a unique diet best suited for it. Worms eat dirt; hummingbirds thirst for nectar. Serve a snake a salad and it will hiss at you as it slithers away into a hole where it will choose to starve to death. Yet, many pet foods are packed with carbohydrates. One beautifully designed package listed the following top unnecessary ingredients: ground yellow corn, chicken byproduct meal, corn gluten meal, whole wheat flour and animal fat. Another leading dog-food brand with all organic brown rice, oats, millet, barley, sorghum, peas and potatoes is described as "fabulous quality ingredients...if you were a goat."

Even the animal parts are problematic. By-products are what's left over after an animal has been slaughtered and all the edible parts removed for human consumption. They consist of every piece and part imaginable. In other words, "mystery meat" of unknown quality or grade. These by-products, ground up and blended with synthetic vitamins and minerals, are obtained from slaughterhouses, but can also include dead animals from farms, ranches, maybe even zoos.

There are other problems. Kibbles, otherwise known as dried pet food, exacerbate dehydration in cats and dogs and contribute to kidney problems. The words on packages do not actually mean what most people think they do. For example, "dinner, nugget and formula" must contain up to 25% actual meat. However, "with" may contain only 3% meat. And "flavor" may contain little to no (0%) meat, yet the package might contain an image of a fresh steak. Similar deceptions apply to words such as "natural" and "organic."

A lot of this deception was revealed in 2006 because of a major product recall and

congressional hearings resulting from a mysterious illness afflicting dogs caused by melamine, a deadly chemical used to make plastic. Subsequently, between 2007 and 2013, dog deaths and illnesses were associated with chicken jerky tainted with trace elements of antibiotics produced in a single factory in China.

The negative attention that thrust the industry into the spotlight created an opening for Blue Wilderness, which developed into a billion-dollar brand, to offer ostensibly healthier, grain-free and more biologically appropriate foods, though a lawsuit filed by Purina later revealed that the upstart company, Blue Buffalo, mislead consumers and engaged in false advertising when it claimed it used no animal byproducts.

Today, many passionate animal lovers have founded and launched pet food companies that form the basis of an alternative industry. Many of these visionaries enthusiastically and transparently talked about their products with the film makers. As for the five main conglomerates, they have gauged consumer sentiment and branded their own newer formulations; however, their spokespeople remained more secretive about the sourcing of their ingredients.

The bottom line is that today there are plenty of options for the educated consumer and animal lover, whether it is the newly popular raw food craze, or the glut of gently-cooked, human-grade options delivered frozen monthly to your door (shout out to my dog Sparky's favorite—The Farmer's Dog). There is no longer a reason to be fooled. Read labels. You can also make your own dog food like my veterinarian friend does. Though, if you are like me, that is going a bit too far.

*"Pet Fooled," September 10, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.*

*Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>*

*To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@mail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@mail.com).*

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