

Pets and the Environment: A Convenient Truth

By: [Emilie Rohrbach](#) ([View Profile](#))

My latest adventure for DivineCaroline put me to the task of uncovering the world of eco-friendly pet food and products. A long-time resident of San Francisco, I had my own vision of what it meant to be eco-friendly: here, we are known to recycle, ride our bikes or the local transit system, eat organic food at Café Gratitude, and play the drums outside in parks on Sundays. I was excited to learn if and how our earth-consciousness extended to our furry companions.

According to a Packaged Facts article about the market trends of pet products, published in 2005, “the number of new pet products (both food and non-food supplies) tagged ‘natural’ or ‘organic’ almost doubled in 2003, while the number of products making other ‘natural-related claims’ more than doubled, and the new product surge continued through 2004, when approximately 500 new pet products with natural, organic, or natural-related tags appeared.” They added that sales for such products are “expected to top the \$1 billion mark by 2009.”

There are thirty-six listings of pet food and pet product suppliers in California that claim to be environmentally accountable in the Green People directory on the Internet. This includes everything from organic tinctures for your frisky feline to pooch sweaters made out of 100 percent cotton or hemp. Annabelle’s Doggie Treats in Belmont offers 100 percent corn and wheat-free biscuits made of the finest human-grade ingredients (meaning, these biscuits are made in facilities that are FDA approved because they also make people food), while Canine Connections right here in San Francisco offers yummy treats like Bella Brittle and gourmet tropical bars that are also organic, natural, and wheat-free, and can be delivered fresh right to your door daily. There are a plethora of organic items for cats, dogs, and other small animals, including aromatherapy dog grooming products, azo-free dyed goods like polar fleece blankets and bone toys, and the “Kong Ferret Treasure,” a non-toxic red natural rubber toy designed to increase a ferret’s socialization skills. Most products that claim to be earth-friendly come in recycled or recyclable packaging.

I was most impressed by businesses that incorporate their love and care of pets and the environment with the global community by establishing relationships with fair trade organizations. For example, among other holistic health care products for pets, [Robbins Pet Care](#) carries organic Guatemalan cat collars, kittynip hackey sacs, and catnip mice made by a group of women outside of Guatemala City who call themselves “*Unidas Para Vivir Mujer*,” or “United for a Better Life.” This group of women got together in 1990 and started making crafts in an effort to provide for their families. Today, their membership has grown from ten to sixty-eight women, all widowed or abandoned by their husbands, and they have been able to contribute to their community in many ways, including building medical and dental clinics, with the proceeds garnered in part by these products.

After reading about all of the organic and holistic products available on the Web, I decided to investigate what products were offered in my immediate neighborhood. A hostile and harrowing experience in an upscale Castro pet food boutique (dog-friendly, yes—eco-friendly maybe—but certainly not people-friendly) led me to the local Pet Food Express on Market Street. Because I had already learned that Pet Food Express is the sixth-largest pet specialty retail store in the U.S., I assumed that quantity might compromise quality. I was happily mistaken.

I was greeted warmly by an employee who, after learning of my mission, introduced me to Michael, one of the managers. Even though a camera crew was present in the store filming an upcoming new segment called “Pets around the Bay” for a local TV show, he still took me on a tour of the entire store, introduced me to an assortment of eco-friendly products, and answered all of my questions.

As a person who’s allergic to most animals and currently lives in a downtown studio apartment where there

are no dog parks around, I certainly can't claim to have the slightest knowledge of things like kitty litter, poop bags, or how a dog's nutritional needs change throughout the course of its life, but Michael was patient with me.

I learned the difference between kitty litter made out of wood, grain, corn, or wheat, and Michael recommended Smart Litter, an organic litter made out of corn and wheat, because it clumps better. For biodegradable poop bags, he recommended Kygen or Bags on Board. He explained to me the difference between pet food that is certified organic (ninety-five percent of its ingredients are organic) versus food that has "made with organic ingredients" on its label (as little as seventy percent of the ingredients could be organic).

The Honest Kitchen, Inc., a certified organic dog and cat food company based in San Diego, stood out as a favorite of Pet Food Express customers for several reasons. The Honest Kitchen offers dehydrated raw dog food for every stage of a dog's life as well as dehydrated raw cat food and herbal nutritional supplements. Because it is not cooked and then sealed in a can (like most pet foods), it is able to retain its nutrients, and it is human-grade quality. As stated on their website, their food is made of only organic grains, hormone- and antibiotic-free meats, and non-GMO produce. Upon further exploration, I discovered that last year The Honest Kitchen, Inc. was given the Dog Food of the Year award by puplife.com, and that it donated just under twenty-five percent of its net profits to charity.

As far as eco-friendly pet products are concerned, Pet Food Express carries a large supply of Worldwise toys, accessories, and bedding for cats and dogs. These products are made from recycled, biodegradable, or certified organic materials. Pet Food Express carries both SmartyKat and PoochPlanet brand names. PoochPlanet dog beds from Worldwise are filled with EcoRest, made from recycled plastic bottles, and cedar shavings from reclaimed cedar mill surpluses. To find the appropriate SmartyKat product for your kitty, Worldwise has a CompleteNeeds system wheel on their website that divides a cat's needs by emotional, instinctual, and physical levels. I was surprised to find that they listed the most environmentally sustainable products in over one hundred product categories, ranging from beauty and hygiene to energy, on their Web site as well.

My investigation leads me to believe there are many easily accessible options out there, both locally in the Bay Area and beyond, for people who want to be eco-friendly in the decisions they make for their pets. Yes, it might mean spending more money, but it also means that you and your pet will be able to sleep better at night, knowing your choices will leave the Earth a better place for the next generation.