

Headlines

 Printer Friendly Version  E-Mail This Article

Published on Sunday, January 6, 2002 in the [Los Angeles Times](#)

Outcry Over Pets in Pet Food

The practice of boiling down euthanized dogs and cats for industrial fat and protein causes an uproar in St. Louis
 by Stephanie Simon

ST. LOUIS -- It started with footage of Blacky and Scoop, melt-your-heart dogs with no one to claim them, alone at the city pound--and due to be put to death within hours. "No one wants them. Alive, that is," the reporter said.

The film then cut to a rendering plant that boils down the city's euthanized dogs, along with dead pigs and cows from local farms and leftover bones, hooves and innards from slaughterhouses. The end products are used to make cosmetics and fertilizer, gelatin and poultry feed, pharmaceuticals and pet food.

It was the pet food that got people. [The report last month](#) by KMOV-TV's Jamie Allman--headlined "What's Getting Into Your Pets"--suggested that dead dogs and cats from local shelters were ending up in kibble. As proof, Allman aired footage of a tanker truck entering the rendering plant, a truck emblazoned with the motto "Serving the Pet Food Industry."

Pet owners went nuts.

Thousands turned to KMOV's online polls to register their disgust. Scores more called animal control departments to demand an end to the practice. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch ran a cartoon showing a mangled collar poking out of a bowl of dog food. "It was unbelievable, the amount of reaction we got," Allman said.

The Millstadt Rendering Co., a small family business that for decades had been taking the region's euthanized animals free, in what the owners thought was a public service, reeled in the face of so much rage. "A disaster for the industry," groaned Clifton Smith, a consultant to the firm. "There's too many people out there who think their pets are like children."

Hoping to free themselves from the public-relations fiasco, the rendering plant announced just before Christmas that it would stop accepting euthanized dogs and cats.

But the local animal shelters couldn't stop euthanizing. And so in counties and small towns throughout the region, animal carcasses began to pile up.

"We were taken flat-footed," said Chris Byrne, an animal control official in St. Louis County.

Every solution was pricey. Hauling the animals to the nearest industrial-scale crematory would cost the county more than \$57,000 a year. Building a crematory would cost up to \$100,000. And there would be the contentious question of where to put it.

In the short term, with freezer space limited, the county has been forced to send its dead dogs and cats to a landfill. The city of St. Louis has taken the same route, arranging for a

Also See:

[The Dark Side of Recycling](#)

by Keith Woods / Earth Island Journal - Fall 1990

[Food not Fit for a Pet](#)

by Wendell O. Belfield DVM / Earth Island Journal - Spring 1996

refrigerated trash truck to pick up the carcasses.

This makeshift solution has prompted still more concerns. If the landfills are not properly lined, the decaying corpses could leach into ground water. If they're not promptly covered, scavengers can pick off the dead dogs and cats. And, as some have pointed out, chucking Fido in a dump scarcely seems a more dignified end than cooking him in a vat with dead cows.

It's a conundrum for animal control officers like Richard Steveson, who has to find a way to dispose of up to 3,500 animals a year in St. Louis. "I like for everything to be done as humanely as possible, even though the animal has already expired," Steveson said. But, given the alternatives, he figures rendering was as good a method as any. He didn't know that the rendered material could end up in pet food, he said. "But even if I had, I don't know what I would have done about it."

Lost in all the emotion have been the facts about rendering--and about pet food.

Rendering has long been considered one of the most environmentally friendly ways to dispose of animal carcasses, because it recycles them into useful fat and protein. By far the bulk of rendered material comes from slaughterhouses. But some plants also mix in road kill, the trimmings from supermarket delis, dead farm animals and euthanized pets from shelters. Los Angeles city and county shelters send more than 120,000 dead dogs and cats to be rendered in a typical year.

Members of The Pet Food Institute, who make 95% of the dog and cat food sold in the United States, use rendered material from livestock in their chow. But they insist there are no ground up pets in their pet food.

"It's a matter of good business," spokesman Stephen Payne said. "We've decided that if this is upsetting to people--and it clearly is--we should take extraordinary measures to make sure it never happens."

Still, it is not illegal to use rendered material from dogs and cats in pet food. And while no one keeps official figures, there's some evidence it happens.

The Food and Drug Administration has found "very, very low levels" of sodium pentobarbital--the chemical used to euthanize animals--in some brands of dog food, said Stephen Sundloff, director of the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine. The agency is investigating whether the traces are "of any significance at all," Sundloff said.

Overall, experts see little health risk in rendered pets entering the animal (or human) food chain, because the high temperatures used in the process kill most agents of disease.

As for the Millstadt Rendering Co., its owners are trying to get back to business as usual.

They maintain that the TV report unfairly linked their product to pet food (the tanker truck with the pet industry logo, they say, was headed to a separate rendering plant that handles restaurant grease). Still, they acknowledge they have no idea where their product ends up. It's sold to brokers who sell it to manufacturers. The way they look at it, they don't need to know the details--and the public probably doesn't want to.

"We don't have anything to hide," Smith said, "but people really don't want to hear about rendering. It's an ugly thing."

Copyright 2002 Los Angeles Times

###

 Printer Friendly Version  E-Mail This Article

FAIR USE NOTICE

This site contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in our efforts to advance understanding of environmental, political, human rights, economic, democracy, scientific, and social justice issues, etc. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the

US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this site for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

Common Dreams [NewsCenter](#)

A non-profit news service providing breaking news & views for the progressive community.

[Home](#) | [Newswire](#) | [Contacting Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Donate](#) | [Sign-Up](#) | [Archives](#)

© Copyrighted 1997-2005
www.commondreams.org