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## Commercial Pet Food: What Is It Good for?

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Companion animals are an integral part of our lives. Nearly 60% of American households have dogs and/or cats. In a recent poll, 66% of respondents said that their companion animals are like children to them.

Eight years ago, Kerry, my shepherd-retriever mix, suddenly became quite ill. Her kidneys were failing and the veterinarian gave her only a few days to live. Within a week, we were forced to make the heartbreaking decision to euthanize Kerry. She was only nine years old.

A few years earlier, my cat Nikko had become ill with what turned out to be a urinary tract blockage. It seemed to come on so rapidly that before it was noticed, he was in critical condition. Miraculously, he is still alive today. At the time, he was just two years old.

These crises made me question what I was feeding my companions. After all, both of their ailments were diet-related, and they were both eating commercial pet foods. I decided that API needed to do some research: What was really in these products? Were they as beneficial as the pet food industry claimed? Were there more nutritious diets that could provide our companion animals with a longer, healthier life?

In 1995, API began informing the public about the hazards of commercial pet food. We issued an investigative report, followed by a shopping guide. Additional resources for concerned consumers include many articles and books about homemade diets for companion animals.

Unfortunately, nothing much has changed since we released our initial report. Government regulation is almost nonexistent, labeling is inadequate, and pet food companies appear to put profits before the health of our companion animals. Annual retail pet food sales in the U.S. now total \$11 billion.

In her article "[Pet Food: Buyer Beware](#)," Debbie Giles takes a fresh look at the pet food industry and its dubious labeling claims. I'm sure that you will find her piece and the other articles in the magazine most informative.