

HOT TOPIC

The nutritional benefit of including organs in dog and cat food



In focus

Pet owners often ask veterinary health care providers why organs are included in pet food. There are nutritional advantages to including organs, and utilizing organs in dog and cat food is also beneficial for the environment.

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takeback
the conversation.

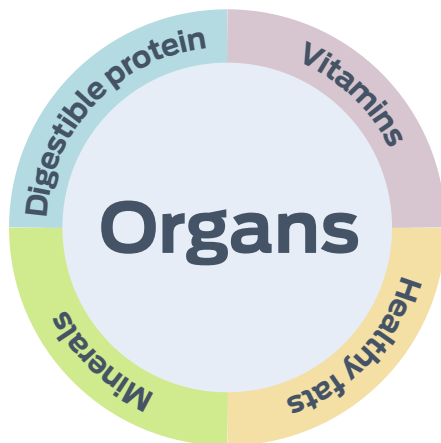
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There are often misunderstandings about the benefits of including organs, also known as offal, in pet food. Organs such as liver, spleen, and kidney are high-quality sources of nutrition for pets. In many cases, these ingredients have increased concentrations of essential nutrients compared to skeletal muscle (meat). Organs are not a cheaper source of nutrition and may be considered a delicacy for humans in many countries. In the European Union, pet food labels may refer to “meat and animal derivatives”, which covers a wide range of animal products including meat (skeletal muscle), organs (offal), and meat and animal meals.¹ In addition to being beneficial from a nutritional perspective, using organs in pet food has environmental benefits.

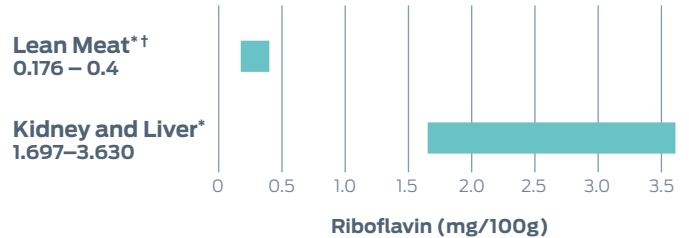
Why are organs included in dog and cat food?

Including organs in a pet food can make the pet food highly nutritious, with nutrients that are easy to digest and absorb. Organs can provide the highly concentrated, high quality amino acids and protein that pets need as well as other essential nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids. Organs can often provide a higher concentration of essential nutrients versus muscle meat and may provide different nutrients compared to meat,² which helps create a complete and balanced diet to help pets thrive. For example, kidney and liver can contain greater than 5–10 times more riboflavin (vitamin B2) than lean meat.^{3,4} Organs can also provide healthy fats, taurine, B vitamins, vitamin A, and several essential minerals. Therefore, including organs in pet food helps provide a dog or cat with all the nutrients needed for them to thrive.



In addition to being highly nutritious, protein from organs can be as digestible as food made solely with skeletal muscle.^{5,6} Highly digestible ingredients are easily broken down and the nutrients are well assimilated. However, like with any ingredient, improper manufacturing processes can impact digestibility and protein quality. It is important that manufacturers use organs from suppliers with stringent quality control standards.

Example of nutrient concentration differences in skeletal muscle (meat) versus kidney and liver: focus on riboflavin (vitamin B2)^{3,4}



* Chicken, beef, pork or lamb
† Based on common cuts of roasted meat

The environmental benefit of using organs in dog and cat food

In addition to being highly nutritious, there is also an environmental benefit to using organs in pet food.⁷ One environmental benefit is reduction of waste. More tissue from fewer animals is used to produce a high quality, nutritious pet food when organs are included. Skeletal muscle from livestock accounts for only 32–48% of their body weight,³ so using skeletal muscle (meat) alone could be environmentally costly if the remainder is not utilized. Using nutritious parts of the animal in addition to skeletal muscle, i.e., organs, in a pet food can therefore help reduce waste while helping provide high quality nutrition.



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