

British Veterinary Association Ends its Opposition to Vegan Diets for Dogs

From [Sustainable Pet Food](#)

British Veterinary Association (BVA)

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In short, it is commendable that the BVA has finally ended its previous, unscientific opposition to (nutritionally-sound) vegan dog diets, has noted the environmental benefits that plant-based ingredients may provide. However, the BVA clearly needs to make much greater efforts to become informed about key recent evidence in this rapidly-developing field.



The British Veterinary Association (BVA) has ended its opposition to (nutritionally-sound) vegan diets for dogs. Until recently, its opposition was regularly reported. This opposition was contrary to the [combined weight of veterinary medical evidence in this field](#). However, the BVA also has a [corporate partnership with Mars Petcare](#), which makes large sums from selling meat-based pet foods. They could lose significant market share, if vegan pet foods succeed (this sector is currently undergoing rapid expansion). Stated Andrew Knight, veterinary Professor of Animal Welfare: “The Mars-BVA partnership represents a significant conflict of interest. Veterinary associations have a responsibility to ensure their positions are evidence-based, up-to-date, and not influenced by conflicts of interest.”

However, following significant critique, in 2023 the BVA ceased its public statements opposing vegan pet food and established a working group to review its position on companion animal diets, including vegan diets.

On 24th July 2024, the BVA publicly ended its opposition to (nutritionally-sound) vegan dog diets, publishing an article, policy position and report on diet choices for cats and dogs:

- [Vets must become the ‘trusted voice’ on alternative pet food: BVA launches new policy position on diet choices for cats and dogs.](#)
- [BVA position on diet choices for cats and dogs.](#)
- [BVA companion animal feeding working group report.](#)

The BVA is to be commended for ending its previous opposition to the use of (nutritionally-sound) vegan diets for dogs. Until recently, this was regularly reported in the media and BVA communication channels

([example](#)). This occurred despite [major benefits for environmental sustainability and food animal welfare](#) associated with vegan diets for dogs and cats.

Pet guardians have been much keener to adopt such diets, however. The [BVA noted](#) that 42% of companion animal vets now reported they had clients who feed meat-free diets. But they also reported that many clients are not routinely discussing dietary choices with their vet, and that 60% of vets were unsure how just many of the cats and dogs they saw were fed meat-free diets. This may occur partly because clients feeding vegan diets often feel their vets are uninformed about (nutritionally-sound) vegan diets, and are incorrectly opposed to them, which makes clients reluctant to discuss these dietary choices with their vets.

Ending previous BVA opposition to vegan dog diets, the new policy position confirmed that: “It is possible to feed dogs a plant-based diet...”. It did not attempt to determine the ‘best’ diet for individual pets but rather, “focuses on supporting pet owners to ensure they are meeting their pets’ nutritional needs as well as meeting their own lifestyle choices.” BVA President Anna Judson said: “We know that owners of cats and dogs are increasingly drawn to pet diets that reflect their own personal values and lifestyle choices, and this is leading to a surge in alternative approaches to pet food. We support owners making informed choices about what to feed their pets ...”

This more progressive position represents a significant improvement. However, the BVA position on vegan pet diets remained overly cautious, and it was disappointing to see several outdated and incorrect positions repeated within the new policy position. For example, there are now [10 studies in dogs](#) and [three in cats](#) demonstrating equivalent or superior health outcomes when (nutritionally-sound) vegan or vegetarian diets are fed. These include very large-scale studies, studies utilising veterinary clinical examinations, diagnostic tests and laboratory data, and studies reporting veterinary assessments, as well as owner opinions (which were recently found to be [reassuringly uninfluenced by diet choice](#)). Collectively, this constitutes an evidence base stronger than that supporting most other commonly-accepted diets or veterinary healthcare interventions. Yet the BVA missed literally all of these studies in its position paper, despite being informed of them well in advance. Instead, the BVA misrepresented the scientific evidence as “the studies are usually small-scale and usually based purely on owner-reported data.” This no longer reflects reality in this field.

Additionally, the BVA stated, “owners should be aware of the difficulties in balancing these [vegan] diets for nutritional needs.” This also reflects the outdated assumption that owners feeding vegan diets are attempting to formulate and balance diets themselves. It is true that this occurred in the past and that it is very difficult to balance home-made diets correctly. However, the reality today is that most pet owners feeding vegan diets are purchasing nutritionally-sound diets from manufacturers who have formulated them to be complete and balanced. Once again, the BVA position appeared ignorant of key, modern realities concerning vegan pet diets, and of the evidence concerning these.

This unfortunately continued with the BVA position concerning the environmental impacts of pet food. The BVA correctly noted that: “Animal ingredients usually have higher environmental impacts overall than plant products, especially in terms of GHG emissions, so increased used of plant-based ingredients could help to improve sustainability ...” However, it’s new position completely missed the [key study in this field](#), again, despite being previously informed of it. This calculated that a global transition toward nutritionally-sound vegan diets for the 471 million dogs and 373 million cats that were owned (excluding strays, etc.) in 2018, would provide major environmental benefits. These were summarised [here](#). For example, if all the worlds pet dogs were transitioned, it would spare more greenhouse gases than produced by the entire UK. If all the world’s pet cats were transitioned, sufficient food energy could be saved to feed 70 million people – more the entire UK population. Transitioning pet dogs would allow 450

million people to be fed – greater than the entire EU population. And around 7 billion farmed land animals would be spared from slaughter annually, or 9% of the global total, with significantly higher proportions in nations with high pet ownership, such as the UK or US.

Instead, the BVA repeated outdated positions concerning animal by-products (ABPs), which have been demonstrated to be incorrect. These include the misunderstanding that use of ABPs in pet food “helps to make the food industry more sustainable as it prevents these products being wasted.” In fact, if not used in pet food, ABPs would be consumed in the manufacturing of a wide variety of other products. Virtually none would be “wasted.” ABPs are used in pet food simply because they are cheap and this lowers costs. But they actually increase (quite substantially), rather than decrease, the environmental impacts of pet food (as their production actually requires more, not less, livestock animals). These factors are calculated and explored in detail within the [study](#) > Discussion > Animal by-product use within society.

The BVA was provided with all of this information in advance, and it was disappointing to see most of the recent scientific evidence concerning vegan pet diets, and the implications for health and environmental sustainability, excluded from its new position paper.

The lack of knowledge of most vets concerning the fast-growing evidence base relating to vegan pet diets is partly due to the fact that most of the relevant studies have only been published since 2021, i.e. very recently. And as the BVA recognises, this is also due to significant gaps within the education of veterinarians, and can result in veterinarians feeling they have insufficient knowledge to engage in client discussions about vegan diets.

However, the key principles are simple ([Suppliers](#) > Choosing a diet). Regardless of diet, clients should be advised to feed diets that are nutritionally-sound. Clients should check product labels to confirm the diet is nutritionally complete and balanced, and purchase diets only from reputable companies that are working with veterinary nutritionists or other nutritional experts, to formulate diets that are nutritionally-sound. The company should also be able to provide some reasonable information about steps taken to ensure nutritional soundness, on their website or in response to inquiries.

In short, it is commendable that the BVA has finally ended its previous, unscientific opposition to (nutritionally-sound) vegan dog diets, has noted the environmental benefits that plant-based ingredients may provide, and stated that, “all pet food companies should be considering animal welfare in relation to their product ingredients, wherever this is possible.” It’s also commendable that their recommendations include: “Work with RCVS to emphasise the importance of nutrition in day one competencies for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, and improve awareness of the need for considerate communication on this topic with animal owners.”

However, the BVA clearly needs to make much greater efforts to become informed about key recent evidence in this rapidly-developing field, especially in light of their recommendations to, “create an accessible resource to help pet owners make decisions on diets that are suitable for their pet, including nutrition, safety, and sustainability aspects,” and to “provide clear explanations on what animal by-products are, including their role in sustainable food systems.” Without being informed about, and utilising, key recent evidence concerning vegan pet diets, neither the BVA nor vets can expect to become [‘trusted voices’](#) on vegan pet diets.