

Ask A Vet: Is Corn Really So Bad?

Sunday, August 18, 2013

Dear Dr. Weldys,

I keep hearing that corn should not be in my dog's food? Is this true?

Dear Reader,

I see the dog food commercials that say grain free and corn free is best too. While corn should not be the sole source of protein in a dog food, it is not a bad ingredient. There are some myths that are commonly believed about corn and unfortunately there are dog food companies that have promoted these misconceptions to market their food.

Myth: Corn is a common cause of allergies. Truth: Corn is one of the least allergenic components of dog food. Beef, wheat, chicken, eggs, dairy, even soybeans have been found in multiple studies to cause more allergies than corn in our dogs. Some dogs with itchy allergic skin may seem to benefit from a grain/corn free diet, but without doing an elimination diet trial it is impossible to know that lack of grain/corn was the reason for the improvement. Perhaps it was simply switching from a low quality food to the higher quality found in many of the grain free diets. Or perhaps it had more to do with a seasonal pollen or change in the environment.

Myth: Corn gluten is a low quality by-product. Truth: Corn gluten is the purified protein part of the corn kernel and is a very digestible, high quality protein. In addition, the amino acids found in corn protein are different than those found in meats. They can be a great way to make sure dog food has the balance of amino acids dogs need. By the way, some common by-products of human food production include gelatin, beef bouillon, Vitamin E (from corn, soybeans and sunflower seeds) and the highly touted beet pulp and tomato pomace found in natural dog foods.

Myth: Dogs can't digest corn. Truth: Cooked corn is very digestible carbohydrate and protein source. While it is true that Fido can't digest raw corn well (neither can people try it), properly prepared corn is more digestible than meat based ingredients. Corn protein is more digestible than rice, barley, wheat or sorghum proteins.

Myth: Corn is used as filler and has little nutritional value. Truth: Filler is defined as having no nutritional value. Corn is a source of high quality protein and carbohydrate. In addition, corn provides vitamins (B complex, E, A), linoleic acid (omega-6 fatty acid required

for skin and hair), and antioxidants (beta carotene, zeaxanthin, lutein). In a study done at a nutritional institute in Austria, vitamin E from corn oil provided more protection against DNA damage than vitamin E from an olive oil/sunflower oil mix.

Keep in mind, reader, that no matter the ingredients in a dog food, quality is key. Poor quality meat, grains, vegetables or other ingredients lead to poor quality food. In general with dog food, you get the quality you pay for whether or not corn is an ingredient.

-Dr. Teresa Alessandri