



“Grain-free pet food is here to stay”

Warren Hill, president of the international division at Midwestern Pet Foods, on the development of natural and holistic pet food, on the US pet market and on e-commerce.

“Our focus is on new product development and existing product improvements.”

How did the US pet industry, and your company in particular, fare in 2012?

The pet food market in the United States continues to grow despite a stagnant economy. Despite the weak economy, the continued success of higher-priced natural, grain-free and holistic pet food and accessories in the United States continues to surprise. For our part, we were pleased to finish 2012 with record US and international sales for “Earthborn Holistic”.

The US pet industry is preparing for the Global Pet Expo in Orlando. What will be the focus at the Midwestern booth?

Our focus will be on “Earthborn Holistic” and our grain-free formulas in particular. We’ll also

highlight recent improvements to our “Sportmix” biscuit line. An all-new product line is in the works; however, February may be too soon for its rollout.

Grain-free pet food has developed from a niche segment to a real success story. What are the reasons for this continuing trend in your opinion?

You’re exactly right, although a lot of people still seem to be in denial about the popularity of grain-free products. Considering grain-free pet foods to be a niche today would be like considering super-premium pet foods a passing trend twenty-five years ago. Grain-free pet food is here to stay.

In many ways the rise of natural and holistic pet food is attributable to the continuing humanisation of our pets. More and more, people everywhere consider their pets to be family members and they’re fed accordingly. The rise of grain-free pet food is related to the humanisation process but with a twist. Today’s consumers have become extremely knowledgeable about the nutritional needs of their pets and they

want to do what’s best for them. In that vein, many people have come to view dogs and cats as carnivores (opportunistic carnivores in the case of dogs, obligate carnivores in the case of cats) and as such, many consumers believe that grains are nutritionally inferior and unnecessary for their pets. This feeding philosophy is permeating markets worldwide.

There is a widespread view that independent pet retailers fare better than the big boxes in the United States. Do you agree with this view? And what are the reasons for this development?

That view is too simplistic. In a growing market there is a place for both mass-market and independent retailers. Nevertheless, so called “big box” stores have changed the entire US retail landscape, not just for pet products but for all markets. Mass markets have decimated vast numbers of independent retailers which were unable to compete with larger, better financed and more efficient operations. Having said that, today when a big box store opens across town, it isn’t a death sentence for the shrewd independent.



Midwestern Pet Foods aims to showcase recent improvements to its “Sportmix” biscuit line at Global Pet Expo 2013.