

Demand growing for eco-friendly pet items

BY PAULA HUNT
San Antonio Express-News

SAN ANTONIO — Now that lessening one's carbon footprint is an issue for humans — in theory, if not always practice — lessening the carbon paw print of our pets has become one as well.

The pet industry has tapped into consumer awareness that, if purchasing and lifestyle decisions have an impact on the earth, then pet ownership has environmental consequences as well.

Whether it's organic or recyclable, earth-friendly products are becoming as common in pet stores as in people stores. There are natural shampoos and grooming products, biodegradable cat pan liners and beds and toys made from recycled materials, cat litter that's easy on the environment, and organic hemp collars and leashes.

It's not just a desire to save the earth that makes consumers purchase these sustainable products.

Product safety is now a factor, whether that means concern about the materials in clay-based cat litter or the ingredients in pet food.

Already on an upswing, sales of

natural and organic pet food took a gigantic leap after the pet food recall in March.

"We couldn't keep food on the shelves; sales jumped up 25 percent," says Joel Silva, a supermarket store manager who carries the Pet Promise, Newman's Own, LifeSpan and PetGuard brands. "The people who came in and bought it have stuck by it."

Cheryl Richter began feeding her two dogs a natural brand of food after one was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder.

"It wasn't until I started doing research that I learned about pure, holistic foods," says Richter. "I think (my dog's) condition has gotten better and I notice that I'm feeding them less, which also means they're pooping less."

Consumers can expect to see more environmentally responsible pet products in the future, especially now that big players like Purina and Mars are entering the natural arena.

"We are seeing a strong interest in eco-friendly products and a lot of talk about sustainable (products) in the industry," says David Lummis, senior pet market analyst at Packaged Facts.

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