

TOO MUCH TRIPE

Sabrina Giannini

MILENA GABANELLI IN STUDIO

Let's start with the new era of urban man who feels the need for a cat or a dog, which is now also "urbanised". We are talking about 14 million people. An industry has developed from nothing around the love for animals, which currently has a worldwide turnover equivalent to 90 billion euros. It is one of the few areas not affected by the consumer crisis and that is constantly growing. All this happens while in Italy we throw away the equivalent of 8.5 billion euros of fresh food every year. So what are the rules governing this gigantic industry and the power of marketing? Sabrina Giannini

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

On planet Earth, thousands of years ago in the Palaeolithic era homo sapiens began to domesticate another mammal, the *canis lupis*. The latter felt that it would be to its advantage to feed on the leftovers of that clever and intelligent animal. Thus began the most extraordinary entente between two different and now indivisible species. The wolf could not have imagined that 12,000 years later humans would be so advanced and that it also would have tagged along with them. And to make it more like us the domesticated wolf has been selected into 400 breeds of dog for: utility, beauty, company, and ornament. Cats have just 50 show breeds in this creative gallery. Thirty three percent of Italians own a pet. Of these 14 million are cats and dogs. They are domestic animals, which tend to monopolise the family sofa and pay the consequences.

ELIZABETH CAMMALLERI - GROOMER

Our ozone therapy treatment is frequently used in the care of our four-legged friends. It is actually a very powerful natural disinfectant and so is often used in veterinary treatments for dermatitis and many other skin problems. For a dog of this size, a normal bath costs more or less about 30 euros and the ozone therapy treatment around 50 to 60.

MARCO CHIARELLI – MOBILE GROOMER

The service targets everyone to some extent, but the main priority is unquestionably the elderly and the disabled. The main thing is to insert the cotton plug so as to protect the dog.

ANGELO BACCOLINI - CREATOR OF "SNOOPY'S REST" CEMETERY

Currently we have in the order of 2,500 dogs, cats and other animals.

DOG OWNER

This is Dik. His life with us knows no end. Together with Toby and Holly another life begins.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Why do you need a place where you can sometimes visit your dog? Wouldn't a photo have been enough like it is for other people?

DOG OWNER

No, because for us Dik is something personal. Something that was a bit of us. And we can never let him go.

DOG OWNER 2

When Ax died I didn't eat for two weeks. It even did me some good. We say: "I'll get a dog", but over the years we realise that it has become part of the family. And then I have others. This is younger.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Ah, she died recently.

DOG OWNER 2

A few years ago. Yes, this one has been dead for a few years.

DOG OWNER 3

I'm a bit comforted by the idea we can still talk. Let's say, we come to see her. It also strikes me a little like a matter of respect. We loved her.

DOG OWNER 4

It's about knowing where your dog is, where you can find the bones of a loved one.

DOG OWNER

Because we think about it, as if we are always together.

DOG OWNER 5

And he was always sick. He never went out.

DOG OWNER 6

What I felt for Beethoven I feel for the four dogs I have at home. One that died two months ago and... I can't explain, that's how I am.

DOG OWNER 7

Because someone who hasn't had a dog can't understand. She certainly was special.

ANGELO BACCOLINI - CREATOR OF "SNOOPY'S REST" CEMETERY

These are the ossuaries from the cat section that we have already exhumed and that will be kept here forever. Anyone who pays 50 euros per year will be entitled to have, upon exhumation, a single ossuary burial niche.

SABRINA GIANNINI

And how much does the interment cost?

ANGELO BACCOLINI - CREATOR OF "SNOOPY'S REST" CEMETERY

It's around 200, from 200 to 250 euros maximum. If people want to do it, they should because we think it's right to respect animals. I thought it was a business, then I realised along the way that it was something else entirely.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Because you spend a lot on prolonging their lives.

SABRINA GIANNINI

For the old ones that have a bit of osteoarthritis? These for example, how much do they cost on the market? These omega 3s?

REPRESENTATIVE

18.30 euros.

SABRINA GIANNINI

18.30 euros? That is practically the same as for humans, or perhaps even a little more. Brite. And so how much does BriteDog cost? To the public?

REPRESENTATIVE

It costs 10 euros.

SABRINA GIANNINI

10 euros.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

But supplements are not deductible expenses ... thank goodness. However, medicines are deductible, in part. The sticking point is their high cost.

MICHELA PETTORALI - VETERINARIAN

We can only prescribe medicines for veterinary use. We cannot prescribe medicines for human use, even though they contain the same molecule.

SABRINA GIANNINI

And they cost less.

MICHELA PETTORALI - VETERINARIAN

Some cost less.

SABRINA GIANNINI

A lot less?

MICHELA PETTORALI - VETERINARIAN

Some yes.

PHARMACIST

Eyedrops 13.50 euros; this a veterinary drug, it's a tobramycin and an antibiotic.

SABRINA GIANNINI

These here have identical active ingredients but are for human use. How much do they cost?

PHARMACIST

So, tobramycin. Tobramycin is made by Farma 1000 and costs 8 euros and 35. And this here is the same generic.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Which costs less than half of the equivalent for veterinary use. But there are cases such as Vet-Ketofen that costs 80 times more than the well known painkiller for human use.

MICHELA PETTORALI - VETERINARIAN

Legally they could fine me, I could get into trouble.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

A fine of up to 9,000 euros for not prescribing the veterinary drug, when it exists. It is politics at the service of the pharmaceutical lobbies and - we shall see - of the food industry, which were the first to grasp that cats and dogs are often a necessity.

OLD LADY

For me she is everything. I may sound a bit ridiculous but it's true. She's all I have.

SABRINA GIANNINI

What's your line of work?

MS OCCHIALI

I'm a care worker. Then when I separated he kept me company. I cried, he cried; I didn't eat, he didn't eat; I laughed and it was his presence that helped me enjoy things.

GIRL

Firstly: love.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

The amount of money spent by Italians on their cats and dogs has increased by 70% over the last 10 years. The shift to industrial food has been the biggest factor in this increase. It is one of the few industries that haven't been hit by the crisis. There's a great idea behind it: turning slaughter waste into gold. Substantial profits. It is not by chance that investment funds are focusing their millions on companies that produce cat and dog food, and on those that distribute it.

SABRINA GIANNINI

The opening of the 139th branch of this supermarket for animals, Arcaplanet. It has grown from 20 shops to 139 in five years. And in fact this is the 139th.

OLD LADY

But always sachets that I buy from the supermarket. Kitekat...

SUPERMARKET CUSTOMERS

The ones that are a bit shaped, which are good for cleaning the teeth, and should be used once a day but she eats 10 a day.

ADVERTISING SPOT

Did you know that four out of five dogs have gum disease? The solution? Dentures for dogs! We're not joking!

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

There's not much to joke about given what they cost! Up to 30 or 70 euros a kilo! This year has beaten the spending record: 128 million euros - million! - just on snacks.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Urban life, adult dogs, dogs in an urban and hectic environment.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

But what happens in winter when they are always on the sofa?

SABRINA GIANNINI

Dogs with a predominantly sedentary lifestyle at home. Indoor life, adult.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

But the sedentary life, you know, doesn't do them any good.

SABRINA GIANNINI

It doesn't make sense for anyone who wants their dog to have a long life or who has already lived long? It's not clear.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

For puppies and pregnant or lactating females. And for those who can't have any more puppies. And given that sterilising makes them tend to put on weight.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Tending to obesity.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Is it because it has allergies? No problem: there is gluten-free, with organic meat, without animals for vegans and with captions that attract fans of nutraceuticals.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Probiotics.

DOG

My mum also eats a lot of things like antioxidants, nutraceuticals...

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Dry food for all breeds and jaws: ideal for Persians to chew on to avoid dangerous hairballs and tartar. Now we just need a dry food that makes a cat live seven lives. Don't worry... it's only a matter of time.

SABRINA GIANNINI

But have you ever noticed what percentage of chicken this contains?

LADY

No idea...

SABRINA GIANNINI

Take a little look at the label.

LADY

But look my dog eats very little of it.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Let's see

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Last year Italians spent 1.8 billion euros on dry food and canned food for cats and dogs. The wet stuff is very wet, as most of the time it contains a great deal of water! Often we can't work out what meat or fish it contains and that is not because of the microscopic type on the labels. A tiny amount of clarity is overwhelmed by a wave of

advertising that transforms what is often slaughter waste into a starred menu ... at least in terms of price. The gourmet veal in Nestlé Purina with veal costs 8.63 euros per kilo, but that little box mostly contains ill-defined meat, water and cereals and only 4% veal. At the butcher's a pound of veal costs 14 euros. A kilo however, not 4%.

Not even the Sultan of Brunei would pay 32 euros a kilo for a jar of meat that at most is only actually 30% meat. If it were all meat it would cost 91 euros a kilo seen as the rest is liver, rice and carrots. Here a can of tuna contains just 50% actual tuna. The rest is fat – who knows from what – fruit and vegetables. Maybe it's the 0.012% papaya content that affects the price. However, quickly totting it up tuna for humans costs a little more, but contains twice the amount of tuna. This product with chicken costs 14.15 euros a kilo. But it is only 4% chicken. The rest is a mixture of derivatives and vegetables. If you buy the clippings from the meat counter you spend a tenth and it's fresh. Above all it's visible. The law on labelling enables manufacturers to write "with chicken or salmon" provided the product contains at least 4% of the flesh mentioned on the packaging. According to people who have looked into it this is the usual percentage. They are not obliged to specify what other meat it contains, whether it arrived at the factory fresh, dried or frozen, or whether it came from Italy or China. In many cases they use offal or discarded slaughter products, or other types of meat which are unfit for human consumption. Entrails, heads, legs, tendons, feathers, skins, horns and meat meal. But we can't know about this either.

ENRICO CHISARI - VETERINARIAN

I find it hard to read the ingredients. I need help. So this food is supplemented with vitamin A, vitamin D, iron, iodine, copper, manganese, zinc, and selenium. And why are there all these additives? Apparently there is not enough in its ingredients and so they add them to create a balanced feed.

DAVID BETTIO - VETERINARIAN

The industrial process alters the raw materials and therefore the proteins and vitamins that then need adding. Why should I take a vitamin supplement when I eat fruit and vegetables every day?

ENRICO CHISARI - VETERINARIAN

Second ingredient: corn. These grains enriched with vegetable and animal proteins may perhaps be a good food for chickens.

DAVID BETTIO - VETERINARIAN

And so when someone says: "Well, if I give my cat raw meat he doesn't recognise it." We should reflect on this, it's astonishing: a predator that doesn't recognise what it usually eats, what they should normally eat. This is abnormal. This is really peculiar.

SABRINA GIANNINI

There is no such thing as a corn eating cat.

GIACOMO BIAGI - PROFESSOR OF NUTRITION UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

No. But not even dogs show much enthusiasm. A cat dies without meat. It dies without meat or fish, without organs, because there is no taurine in its diet. In reality from this perspective dogs are closer to human beings.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Why is it added to cat products if they already contain meat?

GIACOMO BIAGI - PROFESSOR OF NUTRITION UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

Because it is one of those amino acids that is very sensitive to high temperatures. At home too, if you overcook meat the level of taurine decreases to quite a remarkable degree.

SABRINA GIANNINI

But why do I have to give a poor cat something when meat contains taurine by nature? It is overcooked, so taurine is lost, and then you add taurine, perhaps synthetic...

GIACOMO BIAGI - PROFESSOR OF NUTRITION UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

But if the owner comes home and then out of laziness actually just mixes rice with chicken meat it's really no good.

SABRINA GIANNINI

So by giving dogs our leftovers we are killing them.

GIACOMO BIAGI - PROFESSOR OF NUTRITION UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

No, we are not killing them. However, with a relatively simple domestic diet we need to add supplements whether they are simple mineral salts or commercial supplements.

Their diet has been supplemented with soya oil as a source of essential fatty acids. In part obviously omega 3 is also found in fish. Calcium phosphate as we said, also if it's obviously an already fully grown animal, but it will also need a bit of calcium and phosphorus for healthy bones. Carrots can be freely alternated with other vegetables. Onions and garlic are the only two things that shouldn't be given.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Nutritional approaches to a homemade diet do differ. Recently, some vets have suggested a raw food diet.

DAVID BETTIO - VETERINARIAN

Obviously, no dry food packed with carbohydrates, okay. What should you use? Start with chicken gizzards. You don't need much, 30 grams a day. Then you move them over slowly to that excellent offal, green tripe, which is a probiotic, plus raw vegetables, and green leaves.

DEBORA GUIDI - VETERINARY NUTRITIONIST

Patients are sent directly by colleagues to draw up a meal plan. Maybe they don't want pre-packed food, so I won't try to change or alter their diet. We probably just need to adjust dosages. But actually you have been good. You have to tell me everything she eats. I won't tell you off.

DOG OWNER

He eats dentastick.

DEBORA GUIDE - VETERINARY NUTRITIONIST

And how much?

DOG OWNER

One a day. Half at lunch and half at dinner.

DEBORA GUIDI - VETERINARY NUTRITIONIST

Okay. What do you give him between meals?

DOG OWNER

Almost always goat ricotta or organic mozzarella.

DEBORA GUIDI - VETERINARY NUTRITIONIST

Okay. So he eats meat and you give him that in addition...

DOG OWNER

That's right, 25 grams of mozzarella as a snack.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Dr Guidi is one of the few Italian vets specialised in nutrition. So like Professor Biagi she is one of the few teachers to organise a university course that teaches how to formulate homemade diets. A rarity like their patients. Or those of Dr Bettio. Or those like Neve who has eaten fresh food for 12 years, who has never been ill, feeding on the same foods, especially the fresh organic vegetables, that its humans eat and that has saved them at least 5,000 euros. This is precisely why Neve is so special. She is one of the 10% that has never been converted to industrial food. The food suggested by almost all vets.

The first step in food company marketing strategy mirrors that of the pharmaceutical or vacuum cleaner firms. A bit of information about the latest recipes and a set of glossy brochures to leave in vets' waiting rooms, and then...

SABRINA GIANNINI

Who advised you to use packaged food rather than a homemade diet?

CUSTOMER

The vet.

SABRINA GIANNINI

And didn't he offer an alternative diet? The home one, which she eats?

CUSTOMER

Oh, no.

SABRINA GIANNINI

He didn't offer a diet, a written one, for a dog.

CUSTOMER

No.

SABRINA GIANNINI

He didn't say to you: "I'll give you two options"?

CUSTOMER

No, he told me: "Look it's convenient, you can manage it easily on your own."

DOG

My vet was pretty clear, because dry food is easier to give.

DOG

Duck, recommended by the vet.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Do you like this industrial food? Who recommended it to you then?

DOG

The vet.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

The opportunity to play a vet struggling with marketing came at a conference held in a hotel along the Abruzzo coast on the theme: feeding growing dogs from 2 to 8 months. The conference was sponsored primarily by companies that produce packaged food for cats and dogs.

NESTLÉ PURINA SALES REP

The sachets contain two new products in the diet range. We changed the packaging and the name. It's now called Proplan Veterinary Diet but the formulation is the same. This is the whole new range. Now they are divided into sizes: small and mini, medium, or large, and Athletic and Robust according to the chest-abdomen shape

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

This afternoon we are distributing this one. Do you not have it?

SABRINA GIANNINI

No!

SABRINA GIANNINI

As we see Royal Canin is focusing on purebreds. Bulldogs, Poodles...

SABRINA GIANNINI

But what's the difference between a Poodle and a Chihuahua?

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

I'll tell you tell one, **what it looks like**. The Poodle one is much richer in vitamin A, vitamin E, and vitamin C than the Chihuahua to counter the oxidative effect of free radicals.

SABRINA GIANNINI

The French Bulldog, the Bulldog, Boxer, and Jack Russell...

SABRINA GIANNINI

But is there a line for crossbreeds?

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

No, there's the mini.

SABRINA GIANNINI

I think crossbreeds would need something extra. I don't know if you know that they have invented something that prevents dogs' hair from turning white.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Obviously I am just teasing, but can Royal Canin lag behind?

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

It has been discovered that hair turns red and it happens to Maremma sheepdogs, to dogs with white fur because they lack an amino acid in the diet so in this case we have this ... that's why they are divided into breeds.

MILENA GABANELLI IN STUDIO

Maybe soon they'll also be offered Botox to keep them looking young. But what's the difference between organic mozzarella for a dog and what people eat at home? Have they not always thrived on kitchen leftovers? Yes, but over time we have become more concerned about the animal's wellbeing so it is best to add supplements. And so you could stop there also because the supplements are the same as those they add to slaughter waste; scraps that can go one of two ways: flour for chickens, feed and fertilisers where you get a yield of 1 or dry food where the yield is much higher, because for the sake of convenience we are willing to pay as much as a fillet steak. What's behind all this? Marketing campaigns, advice from vets, and the suggestions of nutritionists. In short, it's what pharmaceutical companies do when organising their conferences on the Costa Smeralda, when they invite doctors who they then ask to prescribe drugs that are not always useful. You could say: "But with all the problems facing humanity do we really need to worry about cats and dogs"? Why not! When we spend money, we should know what we are buying and also what it means. How can they say that this dry food is good for a Labrador and another for a poodle? We'll come back to this after the break.

BREAK

MILENA GABANELLI IN STUDIO

Regarding the ever-decreasing boundary between animals and human beings, anyone with children knows that when they leave the maternity ward they are often recommended a brand of milk. The baby gets used to it immediately and then it's tricky to change. More or less the same thing happens when you take a dog from the kennels. Or with the tasters that should rate the different menus. There are also cats and dogs that are professional tasters. I wonder if they enjoy it the same. We sought them out.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

From one scientific report to another vets take promotional items generously donated by sponsors along with information manuals about top flight cats, because we don't see a single image of second division cats, the recipe tasters, the ones on which they are tested.

SABRINA GIANNINI

But has what it means "scientifically demonstrated"?

NESTLÉ PURINA SALES REP

We don't talk about experimentation so as not to run up against... It's research. We have a research centre where we perform the tests in Amiens, 60 km from Paris, where the cats and dogs are kept. We opened the doors of this centre to vets two years ago.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

But they are not invited to the centre in Lausanne, Switzerland thus diverting them to France, to Amiens ... I wonder who has access to the research centre Nestlé says it has in China? Nestle has not allowed our cameras to show cat and dog lovers what they do in the Swiss research centre. And Royal Canin?

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

We also have a kennel and a cattery on the campus in France. We have approximately 200 dogs of various sizes and 200 cats representing the various categories.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Is it open for visits?

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

Totally open.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Could you give me some information: where are the kennels and the cattery, here on campus?

YOUNG WOMAN ON RECEPTION

Over there...

SABRINA GIANNINI

Here in front of us? This is where you keep cats and dogs?

YOUNG WOMAN ON RECEPTION

That's right.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Can we go in to take a look?

YOUNG WOMAN ON RECEPTION

No, you need to make an appointment.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Am I speaking to the press office?

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

Yes you are.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Can I come in and take a look at the campus?

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

No.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Why not? I mean the kennel and cattery where you keep hundreds of cats and dogs ... so people aren't allowed in.

ROYAL CANIN SALES REP

I know madam, those are the rules... You need an appointment with someone to

enter.

SABRINA GIANNINI

An appointment? I already asked for an appointment, just a week ago...

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Royal Canin had already responded with a denial of our request to film the production plant and research centre at its headquarters in southern France.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Beyond this fence the 160 dogs and 180 cats that Royal Canin uses to try out its food and its products should be free or otherwise able in some way to go out occasionally ... but we can't see any dogs out right now, while the houses down there are the places where they carry out tests and experiments on these animals.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

That day they were perhaps busy sampling the menus of the animal chefs. In fact, we never saw them running in what Royal Canin calls an "exceptional environment in terms of the quality of their lives and well-being."

SABRINA GIANNINI

We also heard muffled barking...

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Obviously Royal Canin issues invitations on certain occasions only, when they invite 4000 guests, a carefully selected mix of journalists, vets and breeders: people who will suggest their product to the patients...

VETERINARIAN

Royal has this habit of bringing students to see the factories once a year. They do food tests on the dogs ... making the dogs taste the food. But pet food companies at most test their food on a sample of dogs. But it doesn't seem to me like a terrible torture to give food to a dog ...

SABRINA GIANNINI

But did you see them?

VETERINARIAN

Their food tests? Absolutely yes. They invite a hundred owners with their dogs and they give them the food to eat.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

These are the words of a vet who works at an Italian university: strange she doesn't know that Royal Canin also says it keeps over 300 animals at its centre... And it's hard to think that they all stay out of their cages. Maybe they go up the ramps when there are promotional tours for vets.

HILL'S COMMUNICATION

There is no other place where our devotion to science for the health of cats and dogs and love for them is clearer than here, at the Hill's Global Pet Nutrition Center...

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

The American company Hill's on its website shows the joy of Beagles and cats working tasting the recipes formulated in the study centre at the headquarters in Kansas...

HILL'S COMMUNICATION

This is where our special group of cats and dogs comes into play. In this cutting-edge facility our partners K9 and Feline test our products to help us develop the most nutritious and tasty pet food.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Hill's also didn't want to show us the happy abode of its taster cats and dogs... Along with Royal Canin and Nestlé it assures that its cats and dogs are only subjected to palatability and digestibility tests and are treated very well. Until proven otherwise. This US laboratory in Missouri also assesses reactions to certain ingredients in cat and dog food.

LABORATORY MAN

When a dog has been tested you check that it's breathing. If it stops breathing you strike it. Wake up!

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Parts of the dog's thigh muscle were removed for a biopsy. At least 27 of them were later put down.

In digestive tests the animals had to ingest vegetable oil via a tube inserted into its throat.

WOMAN

Whose is this dog?

MAN

One of those we worked on yesterday.

WOMAN

Really?

MAN

It's an old dog. Blood seemed to be coming out of its mouth.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

These images were filmed secretly in 2003 by an investigator from the US Peta, the world's largest animal rights association. The laboratory was carrying out experiments for Iams. Only after these films were released did the well-known brand owned by Procter & Gamble, declare that it had banned laboratories testing and invasive research on cats and dogs. Last year Iams America was sold to Mars, the owner of Royal Canin.

MILENA GABANELLI IN STUDIO

Without this scandal that shook public opinion packaging wouldn't now in some cases carry the words "cruelty-free", which means: "we guarantee that no one carried out tests on animals to produce this food that for example is used to control kidney failure," or they use old recipes. But there are some who provide a veneer of science by writing that these medical products are "clinically proven". Obviously they cost

much more and no one would think of buying them if vets didn't recommend them. What a genius!

DOG

I always eat Royal Canin gastro-intestinal.

WOMAN

More or less 300 euros a month.

SABRINA GIANNINI

But the prices vary from 81 euros to almost 100 for 14 kilos. These types of products are usually only recommended by vets.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

Vets often think no alternative exists despite the option of producing a homemade recipe.

GIACOMO BIAGI - PROFESSOR OF NUTRITION UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

He has calcium oxalate stones so in this situation we need to avoid excess calcium.

SABRINA GIANNINI

She will then use fresh produce, the lady will buy each single ingredient.

GIACOMO BIAGI - PROFESSOR OF NUTRITION UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

That's right.

SABRINA GIANNINI

As an alternative to the purchase of these products, that the animal rejects. So they are diets, not medicines.

GIACOMO BIAGI - PROFESSOR OF NUTRITION UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

No, no, they are diets.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

The last of 10 meetings on renal impairment; the speaker is Andrea Zatelli, an industry expert. The tour is sponsored by the supplements company for which Dr Zatelli is advisor and by Hill's, which promotes to vets the latest diet for cats and dogs with urinary tract disease.

SABRINA GIANNINI

So if I go to 10 vets, not a single one of the 10 suggests a homemade diet. The marketing operation has been very effective.

ANDREA ZATELLI - VETERINARIAN

That's beyond dispute.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Clinically proven in order to extend the life expectancy of dogs with kidney problems.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Did you do the studies yourself or was it the various sponsors who in some way have looked for the effects of these foods on the animal in the long term? Any negative

effects?

ANDREA ZATELLI - VETERINARIAN

Yes that's right, the companies fund the studies.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

Let's return to the congress in Abruzzo. Purina suggested to vets a food for digestion as if it were the latest novelty and highlighted the scientific evidence. On closer inspection one study was from 1986 and the other from 1997. It's not really anything new. However, there are vets who prefer to read the labels rather than the research.

ENRICO CHISARI - VETERINARIAN

This is a complete food for medium-size adult dogs with sensitive digestion. What is sensitive digestion? Is it an illness? No. Perhaps it's a symptom. It would be interesting to investigate further to discover the cause of a sensitive digestion. This contains 6,000 milligrams per kilogram of bentonite. Well, this is interesting, because bentonite is a clay used for cat litter. That's what bentonite is. Bentonite certainly has an absorbing function.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

Perhaps bentonite also absorbs diarrhoea in the intestine and not only in the litter. Meanwhile Scivac, the biggest scientific company organising conferences and training events for vets, takes money from the food industry. While the vets' association participates enthusiastically in the promotion of the food industry along with Arcaplanet animal supermarkets. Many private clinics are starting to sell diets to help fight illnesses, although they don't yet have exclusive sales rights like their French colleagues.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Is it true that here in France unlike in Italy, you vets have the exclusive right to prescribe diet foods?

VETERINARIAN - TOULOUSE FRANCE

Yes, that's right. Here in France, we vets have exclusive rights to sell prescription diets. Alternatively there are internet sites, but still run by vets

SABRINA GIANNINI

Don't you think that selling these foods is not really your job? I glimpse a conflict of interest. Do you?

VETERINARIAN - TOULOUSE FRANCE

No, there's no conflict of interest.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

So would vets link an illness suffered by a patient to a product that they themselves have suggested?

WOMAN

This is the how it was before, full of pustules.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Have you linked this with food?

WOMAN

Yes, that's what made me change the dry food. But from one dry food to another.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Tell me how many times you've changed vet.

WOMAN

This is astonishing. Six or seven.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Six or seven vets before changing diet completely.

WOMAN

Yes Yes Yes

SABRINA GIANNINI

And what did all those six or seven say?

WOMAN

Always the same thing.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Change the dry food.

WOMAN

Yes.

WOMAN

I switched from dry food A to dry food B, but normal. Then there was the switch to the medical one. In this case gastro-intestinal. The following year saw a sharp deterioration.

WOMAN OWNER OF SANDRA

After that they recommended a type of dry food perfect for her problem, that is, for kidney failure. We are talking about what they call "renal" food.

But we didn't see any improvement, or rather I actually had the sense that Sandra was getting worse. I asked the vet again, who told me that this was the only medicine that would help her and to continue.

WOMAN

He urgently advised me to switch to "renal" food. During those two years of "renal" food, the cat deteriorated badly.

DAVID BETTIO - VETERINARIAN

It seems to me that in approximately 80-82 cases, the change in diet that we always recommend - switching from an industrial diet to a natural diet - results in a cure in about 65 cases out of those 80.

SABRINA GIANNINI

How long did it take for her to improve?

WOMAN

A month.

WOMAN

After 15 to 20 days the illness had completely disappeared.

WOMAN

So. When we changed diet I noticed improvements in the space of perhaps a couple of months.

WOMAN OWNER OF SANDRA

Sandra has now been fine for two years. We discontinued the medicines and we stopped the industrial food. We use raw food and sometimes also homecooked. That's all.

DAVID BETTIO - VETERINARIAN

It would be interesting for someone to go to the trouble and expense to really investigate, to see how patients that follow a homemade diet of a certain type do over 10 years. That would be an interesting study.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Have you found that some patients recover after replacing industrial food with homemade and fresh?

ENRICO CHISARI - VETERINARIAN

Often, and without changing or without bringing in other variables and thus without starting treatments.

ERNESTO CASTELNUOVO – PRESIDENT OF THE FELINE ASSOCIATION OF TICINO

We lost four puppies in 24 hours.

SABRINA GIANNINI

What sort of puppies were they? Show ones?

ERNESTO CASTELNUOVO – PRESIDENT OF THE FELINE ASSOCIATION OF TICINO

They were show puppies, that's right. On examining the subject in question we found extensive necrosis of the lingual mucosa with tissue loss. Pharyngeal lymph nodes swollen with purulent inflammation. Ulcerated vocal mucosa. It was a similar picture in the oesophagus and stomach. If a private person loses a cat and they don't think about it, they don't consider an autopsy, and don't think about investigating it. The breeders, when they lose four at once, then begin to think about it, to look for the causes, to look for the mistake. Maybe I was wrong to use the food.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

The autopsy report actually linked the sudden death of the puppies to food poisoning probably caused by a mycotoxin that can be found in grains contained in dry food...

ERNESTO CASTELNUOVO – PRESIDENT OF THE FELINE ASSOCIATION OF TICINO

An aflatoxin is like a mould that attacks cereals and then remains in the dry food. We didn't think it was that destructive that quickly. We knew it had already happened to

other breeders but didn't think it could happen to us too.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

Also breeders in France, who however didn't just demand an analysis of the bodies of the dead animals but also the of dry food with which they fed them ... by sending samples to researcher Annie Leszkowicz, an expert in mycotoxins for the Ministry of Research.

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

We were contacted by various breeders who reported the symptoms suffered by their cats and dogs: vomiting and diarrhoea, liver problems, and retarded growth, loss of weight, but also teratogenic effects... Deaths and deformities in kittens, in particular.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Did you immediately suspect that mycotoxins were present?

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

Indeed, the problems emerged following the introduction of cereals in dry food, before then there weren't any. When analysing cereals we look for heavy metals and mycotoxins.

Here we have the source, the sources of mycotoxins. Cereals in general, corn in particular, here is flax...

SABRINA GIANNINI

And here there is a match between the mycotoxins found in dry food and in the animals' organs.

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

Yes, here you can see... the liver, the kidneys, the brain and the intestines.

SABRINA GIANNINI

How many products have you checked and tested over the past few years?

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

I don't know, between 50 and 100 ...

SABRINA GIANNINI

And in how many of these have you found worrying levels of mycotoxins?

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

Well, let's say at least a quarter of these products contained objectively problematic levels. We analysed the food, but also the organs and the blood of the kittens and their contaminated mothers.

When the following year the problems resurfaced with the same brands ... we did further analyses and uncovered the entire chain of contamination: from the mother to the puppies and the dry food.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

Acute symptoms such as malformations and deaths. But also long-term effects, which emerge after years of exposure to the invisible toxins contained in the dry food ...

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

The various mycotoxins can cause cancer. Aflatoxin affects the liver, ochratoxin the kidneys, and fumonisin the digestive tract...

Dogs are the animal that is most sensitive to ochratoxin, which can cause kidney cancer.

SABRINA GIANNINI

So would you call this an unregulated industry?

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

So it is! There are not even "recommendations" specific to dogs and cats. There's no regulations, that's for sure!

This is really the point. The companies, Royal Canin and the others, are free to base things on "recommendations" calibrated for other animals: pigs, horses or cattle. The problem is that these levels are too high for a dog or a cat...

SABRINA GIANNINI

Do the companies consider it normal for the same amount of a mycotoxin tolerable for a horse to be also tolerable for a cat weighing perhaps 100 times less?

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

That's right... !

After all, it might be more logical to follow food regulations for human nutrition, even better that of child, which are closer to the needs of the animal due to its size. There are also physiological reasons...

Dogs and cats are carnivores, while dry food contains many grains, which are not particularly suitable for a dog or a cat. The cat then ... is strictly carnivorous.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Are your cat or dog less exposed to the risk of mycotoxin contamination when fed on a homemade diet?

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

It is certainly preferable cook them fresh meat, thus reducing the risk of contamination.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

Also because they would be fed with our cereals that are discarded when they exceed the danger limit for mycotoxins.

However, discarded doesn't mean off the market or dumped in landfills. There is an industry that recycles them, which isn't obliged to respect any limits so it can buy them at sale prices and put them in wet and dry food...

ANNIE LESZKOWICZ - PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING UNIVERSITY OF TOULOUSE

That's right, unable to enter the human food circuit they can be diverted to the animal one ... which is only based on "recommendations".

SABRINA GIANNINI

Why should there be limits for us and not for cats and dogs?

ENRICO BRIVIO - EUROPEAN COMMISSION SPOKESMAN

I had a look and I don't know...

SABRINA GIANNINI

Well we know why.

ENRICO BRIVIO - EUROPEAN COMMISSION SPOKESMAN

Why?

SABRINA GIANNINI

Well, for a few thousands of euros.

ENRICO BRIVIO - EUROPEAN COMMISSION SPOKESMAN

But no, I don't think so.

SABRINA GIANNINI – VOICE OVER

Not surprisingly, among the many types of dry food analysed, Professor Leszkowicz found more or less worrying levels of mycotoxins in both the cheap products and in the more expensive ones such as Nestle Purina, Royal Canin and Eukanuba.

Indeed, the highest mycotoxin content was found in Hill's Oral Care for cats that perhaps prevents tartar ... but it exposes them to much more serious risks. In fact, even in low doses mycotoxins eaten on a daily basis can increase the likelihood of developing cancer.

Yet Hill's, like other companies, pushes in its leaflets the theory that animals should not vary their diet. Imprinting begins as early as the purchase of a purebred puppy at a breeder - imprinting the customer.

BREEDER

We recommend that the puppy continue for the first year with the feed he began with, with which he set off.

SABRINA GIANNINI

I read that on the Royal Canin website, but what do you recommend?

BREEDER

Very good, we recommend Royal Canin for puppies. Indeed when someone collects the puppy they also receive the puppy kit. We also give them a card to register on the Royal site and they will send you a bit of documentation and a voucher for a kilo of feed and various stuff.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

A modest investment when compared to the final gain given that a 12 kg sack of dry food for a Labrador costs 60 euros... and it's not even enough for a month.

If the Labrador lives for 15 years it costs the owner 10,000 euros ... obviously only if the loyalty operation succeeds thanks to the first product sponsor: the breeder... Who in return is given visibility on the Royal Canin site and can sell their purebred puppies more easily. Only this ...?

BREEDER

We have bags for the breeder.

SABRINA GIANNINI

So I can buy it here?

BREEDER

You can buy it here. The one-kilo bag at the shops will cost you almost 10 euros ... here you pay the same but it contains 3 kg more, so if you add it up you save 30 euros.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Using the breeders as their first channel of promotion and sponsorship is not Royal Canin's only idea...

Like the idea of sponsoring shows and events. If we trace the marketing it leads to farmers, vets and researchers ... But it needs the final and decisive step: successfully taming European politics, which has learned to obey.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Could the manufacturers of cat and dog food not list the presence of preservatives or additives on the label?

ENRICO BRIVIO - EUROPEAN COMMISSION SPOKESMAN

The European Community's rule is that there should anyway be a phone number, a freephone number that consumers can call if they want more information.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

In fact, the packaging is so covered with unnecessary, misleading writing bordering on the deceitful that it lacks space for the most important details, such as the technical specifications of chemical preservatives and antioxidants, in particular the ones that may be suspicious. The European regulations only require companies to answer all questions.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Hello, is this Hills?

HILL'S ON THE PHONE

Yes.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Can you tell me which antioxidants are used and which preservatives? You at least have the ingredients list don't you? Or maybe not?

HILL'S ON THE PHONE

That's right, we write "preservatives".

SABRINA GIANNINI

In general.

HILL'S ON THE PHONE

Yes. Even if I tell you them, you still won't know whether giving our food to the dog it

would harm your pet or not.

PURINA VET ON THE PHONE

Hello Purina.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Good morning, are you the vet?

PURINA VET ON THE PHONE

Yes.

SABRINA GIANNINI

What oxidant is used in the Purina Pro Plan - Small and Mini? If it's not written (on the package), could you tell me over the phone?

PURINA VET ON THE PHONE

There are fatty acids in general. BHA is an antioxidant acid but it also helps nourish the brain. It is used in puppy feed and is also present in breast milk, that is, the human variety.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

To say BHA - a synthetic preservative - is contained in breast milk is false. While it is true that the International Agency for Research on Cancer has categorised it in the group of substances that could be carcinogenic to humans. These antioxidants are used by the industry to prevent the oils contained in preserved foods from turning rancid, which is why the European Commission has authorised them.

SABRINA GIANNINI

If whether it's there was the first question; the second one is in what concentration within the food.

PURINA CALL CENTRE VET ON THE PHONE

If you leave me your number I can get the call centre to ring you back directly as there are ...

SABRINA GIANNINI

The call centre person told me to call you because she didn't know what to tell me ...

PURINA CALL CENTRE VET ON THE PHONE

I understand but, if you leave me your number I will get her to call you back.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Given the vague responses we tested the products ourselves in the laboratory. Result: the sample of Hill's C/D contains BHA. It is also present in the sample of Purina Nestlé analysed. At even higher doses and in the company of a second preservative: BHT. However, Royal Canin is not reluctant to declare its presence to people who call the freephone number.

ROYAL CANIN ON THE PHONE

Generally we use BHA and BHT in our food.

SABRINA GIANNINI

Do you know that BHA is a potential carcinogen?

ROYAL CANIN ON THE PHONE

I know that it could be carcinogenic but I also know that we use it in an amount that causes no harm to anyone

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

When you connect a product of theirs to a side effect they tend to ask for a phone number.

HILL'S CALL CENTRE ON THE PHONE

Do you know what kind of preservative it is allergic to?

SABRINA GIANNINI

No, not if you don't list the preservatives...

HILL'S CALL CENTRE ON THE PHONE

So even if I tell you... I will ask our vet to contact with you who will give you all the information you need.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

This is how they handle a possible emergency. It would however be appropriate for the Ministry of Health to collect and publish the reports, like in the United States, where owners can report side effects on this section of the Food and Drug Administration website.

Obviously, this transparency can lead to investigations, to product withdrawals and to transform a few negative experiences into a big problem for many, as well as having legal consequences...

QUESTION

Why did you withdraw Beneful, which was available in Italy until last year?

PURINA MALE REPRESENTATIVE

We took it off the market, but not because it didn't work, it was purely linked to commercial reasons.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Nestlé's Beneful dry food for dogs is no longer on Italian supermarket shelves. Meanwhile in the United States the Food and Drug Administration are monitoring this product after numerous reports from dog owners who connect it to the death or poisoning of their pet ... A 5 million-dollar class action for compensation has been taken out against Nestlé. It is still an open question. The complaint speculates about the responsibility of mycotoxins and of another preservative, propylene glycol, an additive also allowed in human foods and cosmetics at low doses ... also in Europe.

ENRICO BRIVIO - EUROPEAN COMMISSION SPOKESMAN

So yes, that particular preservative is accepted it is one of the permitted raw materials even though it may perhaps be toxic to some kind of animals, for cats.

SABRINA GIANNINI - VOICE OVER

Not cats living in the United States because propylene glycol for cats is prohibited there. And if it's true that they don't put it in cat food in Europe, it would be good to oblige the manufacturers to write it on labels of food products for dogs, which actually eat in

the bowl next to those of their "bitter enemies".

When today's distant relative of the wolf eats a fake bone as a snack, he sniggers behind his paws watching the cat while it eats its dry food unaware that a fat has been sprayed onto the surface, to trick him into thinking he is eating a mouse instead...

MILENA GABANELLI IN STUDIO

But who gets the mice now? So, pulling the strings: given the vagueness of the labelling, the limited regulatory constraints, which can also be violated because they are still discussing penalties six years on, we asked at least one of these manufacturers to show us the raw materials, that is, what lies behind all this mass of words. The responses were quite varied. Some people wrote "we have to protect the secret of our recipes", but to us it would be enough to see the "original ingredients" of the dry food; another said "right now I'm redoing water tanks"; a third "the factory burned down"; the fourth "I produce in Thailand". So. We would have been willing to go anywhere, but there was nothing we could do. Not even for the president of the trade association, who is also a manufacturer. As for preservatives we have to say that we eat them too and they have their uses. The difference is that our beloved pets eat them every day of their lives and we don't know whether they also contain non-chemical ones. However, we really need to take our hats off to the people who have succeed in transforming slaughter waste into refined 5-star pâté that so many people buy, because it's become a sin to give animals leftovers, to the point that this industry is, during the general consumer crisis, one of the few areas of growth... Hats off indeed! You are right to keep your recipes secret.