

Special Report

Petco's Whole Health Initiative

Petco has been making incremental steps toward redefining itself as a pet wellness-focused retailer. The retailer has taken major steps through eliminating shock collars and food products with artificial ingredients from its shelves in the last few years. The company in late March solidified its resolve to focus on pet health with the unveiling of Petco Whole Health, an industry-leading framework that repackages its products and services into five interconnected components of pet health: physical, mental, social, home life and accessibility to healthcare. Petco Whole Health serves as a guide not only for the company in its business practices, but also for pet owners in their endeavor to support their pets' well-being.

"The Whole Health philosophy is at the core of our journey from pet specialty retailer to a 360-degree health and wellness partner," said Tariq Hassan, Petco Chief Marketing Officer. "We know pet parents want to do the best for their pets; they just need support to know how. This provides a clear framework for pet parents to act in the best interest of their pets, further defines our mission to improve lives for pets and pet parents and sets a baseline for what's to come from Petco in the health and wellness space. The simultaneous launch of our new creative campaign and strategy—it's what we'd want if we were pets—brings it all to life by confirming our commitment to delivering the same, if not better, care for the well-being of pets that we expect for ourselves as humans."

Road to Wellness

In 2019, Petco resolved to remove items from its product catalog that make use of artificial ingredients. The company defines such ingredients as:

- **Artificial Colors:** Any dye, pigment or other substance, which is not a derivative or mimic of a natural compound, that can impart color to a food
- **Artificial Flavors:** Any substance, the function of which is to impart flavor, which is not derived from a spice, fruit or fruit juice, vegetable or vegetable juice, edible yeast, herb, bark, bud, root, leaf or similar plant material, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy products, or fer-

mentation products

- **Artificial Preservatives:** Chemical substances added to or sprayed on the outside of food to retard spoilage, deterioration, discoloration, or contamination by bacteria and other disease

"We'll also introduce a playbook and toolkit later this year to help employers go pet-friendly when they return to work—which we believe will create better work environments for pets, people and employers alike. Additionally, we recently committed to increasing our assortment of sustainable pet products to 50 percent by the end of 2025. I'm proud of the strides we've taken to date and look forward to furthering our mission of improving the lives of pets, pet parents and our own Petco partners in the years ahead."

**— KATHERINE NAUMAN,
PETCO**

organisms and excludes preservatives that are derivatives or mimics of natural compounds

As part of its rigorous standards, Petco explained, "Our new nutrition standards do not allow for products which simply specify 'Added Colors,' and require that the source of the added color is identified in the ingredient panel."

However, not all non-natural ingredients are eliminated. "We are not removing products with synthetic vitamins, minerals and amino acid supplements as these ingredients are often necessary to ensure that dog and cat food is complete and balanced, according to AAFCO nutrient profiles and feeding guidelines."

In 2020, Petco subsequently announced it would no longer sell shock

collars operated by a person with a remote in hand and instead began a #StopTheShock campaign to promote positive training and encourage others in the pet industry to do the same. To jumpstart this initiative Petco has also offered a free introductory online training class for pet parents interested in positive reinforcement training.

"We say goodbye to remote controls that cause pain, and hello to expert trainers who mentor pets and pet parents with positivity, patience and compassion," said CEO Ron Coughlin of the campaign. "Today, we call on the rest of the industry and anyone who loves pets to join our movement and help us drive positive change beyond just Petco."

Petco's Pet Wellness Council further backs the positive reinforcement training. "To train a dog using positive reinforcement is to respect their dignity and worth as more than a possession obtained for personal satisfaction," said Dr. Alexandra Horowitz, Sr. Research Fellow and Head of the Dog Cognition Lab at Barnard College, Columbia University. "If you want to build bonds with dogs, you must always choose a relationship built on positive reinforcement over one predicated on punishment, shame or fear."

Most recently this past March, Petco also removed traditional rawhide options from store shelves. With pet parents spending significantly more time at home with their pets through the Covid pandemic, busy bones and long-lasting chews that keep pets busy and provide needed mental stimulation had been more in demand, with related product sales rising more than 10 percent last year compared to 2019, according to the company. According to research from Petco's 2019 customer survey, 71 percent of consumers have concerns with traditional rawhide, including choking, digestibility and origin of ingredients. As a result, the company removed all 32 traditional rawhide products from store shelves in favor of highly digestible rawhide and rawhide-free meat- and plant-based alternatives, made with perforations to make them easier to digest.

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