

Why 2026 Is the ‘Year of the Cat’ and What It Means for Pet Retailers

By Joe Toscano, Vice President, Trade & Industry Development at Purina

Cat ownership in the U.S. continues to climb at an unprecedented pace, with 49 million households now sharing their homes with cats, which is a 23% increase since 2023, according to the American Pet Products Association. This growth is reshaping the pet aisle and setting the stage for 2026 to be the Year of the Cat. With more consumers looking to elevate the way they feed, treat and care for their cats, opportunities across the category have never been stronger.

Products Designed Around Cat Parents’ Priorities

Across our cat portfolio, Purina continues to meet the moment with products that reflect the evolving needs and expectations of today’s cat parents. From elevated textures and culinary-inspired recipes to solutions that simplify care, our approach centers on making the bond between cats and their families easier, more joyful and more attainable.

Palatability and texture-led experiences are both influencing consumer buying decisions. Fancy Feast® Gems® bring refined culinary artistry to the bowl with tender paté centers wrapped in elegant, savory layers that form a pyramid shape preferred by even the most finicky feline – perfect for pet parents seeking a premium dining experience for their cats. Meanwhile, the rise of younger cat owners has fueled growth in interactive feeding and treating. Friskies® Lil’ Lickables™, a hands-on treat, and Purina ONE® Immune Support Purées – lickable cat treats featuring Vitamin E and Omega-3 fatty acids – both tap directly into that trend by offering a fun, engaging way for people to bond with their cats.

Innovation Inside and Outside the Litter Box

With so many new cats entering households, the litter aisle remains one of the most reliable and resilient segments in the pet category. Premiumization is shaping this space, with consumers seeking better odor control, simplified maintenance and more sustainable options.

Odor control remains the top priority for litter shoppers, and Purina is addressing this need with new Tidy Cats® Performance options launching in January, delivering powerful odor control designed to keep homes with cats smelling clean. Convenience continues to be



a key driver as well, seen in options like Tidy Cats® LightWeight or the Tidy Cats® Breeze® Litter System, which simplifies upkeep with disposable pads that lock in moisture and odor for seven days (for one cat, when used as directed) and pellets that last a month.

Innovation also extends to the growing automated litter segment. Purina partnered with Litter-Robot® to develop a litter specifically optimized for the Tidy Cats® The Perfect Cycle™ setting in the Whisker app, helping consumers get the most out of their automated cleanup systems.

Outside the litter box, we continue to showcase our scientific expertise with Purina ONE® LiveClear® – an innovation backed by more than 10 years of research – which has been shown to simply and safely reduce the major allergen in cat hair and dander by an average of 47 percent, starting with the third week of daily feeding. Now widely available, Purina ONE LiveClear helps cat lovers with allergen sensitivities spend quality time with their cats.

Helping Retailers Win

Purina’s leadership goes beyond product innovation. We’re continuing to support retailers through the myPurina app, a

loyalty and engagement platform that rewards shoppers for interacting with the Purina portfolio. The app also introduces pet owners to nutrition tips, training advice and complementary products, helping drive broader basket exploration and long-term engagement.

And, with our dedicated category team, we work hard to collaborate directly with retailers on data-backed strategies, merchandising recommendations and solutions such as shelf optimizations that double capacity for larger litter pails, improving both sales and in-stock performance.

As the industry steps into the Year of the Cat, Purina remains committed to anticipating consumer needs and helping retailers capture the momentum across food, treats and litter. With a robust pipeline of innovation and a holistic approach to supporting cat owners – all backed by a bench of nearly 500 Purina scientists, veterinarians and pet care experts – we are proud to help retailers unlock the full potential of this defining moment for the feline category.

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