

## Dog Marketplace: The Whole Package

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Dog owners want it all when it comes to the chews they give their pets.

*By Ramona D. Marek*

The story will forever remain the same: Whether it's a teething puppy exploring its environment or a senior working its jaws, dogs chew. But what has changed in the world of chews is the fact that consumers, shadowing their own nutritional preferences, demand safe, natural, wholesome, locally sourced ingredients.

"The American Pet Products Association (APPA) 2013-2014 National Pet Owners Survey shows that there has been a decrease in rawhide sales and an increase in natural as well as organic treats over the last five years," said Kathleen Kintz, digital marketing specialist at Natural Polymer International Corp. (NPIC) in Plano, Texas. "We want to know what's in our food and what we're putting in our bodies, and that transfers to the pet world."

### [From Antlers to Pizzles](#)

Consumers are purchasing a wide variety of animal parts, retailers and manufacturers reported.

"Just six years ago, when we entered the pet industry, there were not a lot of choices in chew categories, but these days when you go to trade shows like Global Pet Expo or SuperZoo, you see many manufacturers with many different chews, especially in the animal parts category," said Suman Shrestha, co-founder and president of Himalayan Corp., manufacturer of the Himalayan Dog Chew in Mukilteo, Wash. "The chew category is small compared to food and treats but is definitely growing rapidly."

Cheri Zachow, manager of Natural Pet NW in Vancouver, Wash., said the favorites at her store are Bravo! Bully Sticks.

"They have become a top seller because of their overall appeal with no odor or staining," Zachow said. "Being a muscle chew, bully sticks are also a nice, high-protein, low-fat chew that does not come off in pieces, but instead must be worn down. And one last bonus is that they are not as hard as some of the other chews out there, so there is less danger of damaging teeth."

Bully sticks from Redbarn Pet Products and other manufacturers are the top-selling chews at Tullivers Pet Food Emporium in Santa Fe, N.M., said owner Ellen Hutchins.



Concentrate dental chews in one area to get dog owners' attention. *Tullivers Pet Food Emporium*

"The long, cylindrical chews can be purchased in 6-inch, 12-inch and 3-foot lengths, and they also come in spiral and ring shapes," Hutchins said. "Dogs go crazy for them, and they are a safer, healthier and more easily digestible alternative to rawhide. For the average chewer, bully sticks can last a while, which dog guardians appreciate."

Other body-part chews from various animals rank highly, too.

"Currently our top-selling dog chews are beef tendons and duck feet," said Julie McQuade- Heyes, owner of The Whole Pet in Fayetteville, Ark. "Our customers ask for chews that are all natural and made in the USA largely because of the increasing number of pet food and treat recalls that have been reported in the news in recent years."

The demand for antler chews has increased over the past two years, said Bart Zandstra, sales and marketing manager at American Antler Dog Chews in Griffith, Ind.

"Customers want a clean, healthful, long-lasting dog chew," Zandstra said. "Antlers contain calcium and nutrients important for a dog's health, and antlers come from a renewable source, and this is an added bonus."

American Antler Dog Chews recently added new antler rope toys and buttons for variety and efficiency, Zandstra said.

"Antler buttons are the burr that forms between the antler and the animal's head to facilitate the shedding process," Zandstra said. "They look like cookies."

Manufacturers are heeding consumer demand for all-natural, wholesome, products by offering more choices in dog chews.

Cal Premium Treats in Perris, Calif., is emphasizing sustainability with fish from Hawaii and also is importing duck from France and buffalo from Europe, said Art Bouskos, national sales manager.

Kintz of NPIC said later this year the company will release a product for puppies, N-Bone Puppy Bone.

"We saw a need for a bone that would start young pups that have just gotten their adult teeth on the right path to lifelong healthy teeth and gums," she said. "Added calcium and DHA help puppies grow strong bones and support healthy cognitive growth during the critical stages between puppyhood and adulthood."

Multifunctional chews are popular, Kintz said.

"Consumers want a treat that will keep their dog busy but can also help keep their teeth clean or help with joint issues," she said.

Himalayan Corp. is answering the made in the USA call, Shrestha said.

"The current demand has encouraged us to make Himalayan Dog Chew in the USA," Shrestha said. "Keeping our trade in Nepal, which helps hundreds of farmers as is, we have started working on producing the Himalayan Dog Chew made in the USA, which will be released in August."

Promoting Made in USA chews is a win with customers, agreed Bouskos. He also suggested retailers take advantage of point of sale and point of purchase displays.

## Dental Chews

February is known as National Pet Dental Health Month, but dental health for dogs matters year-round, and retailers can get that message out to customers in a variety of ways.

"Dental health isn't an issue only in the month of February," Kintz said. "Bringing it to owners' attention with signs, posters, endcaps and rotating discounts on different dental care products might be a good strategy for retailers to keep it in the forefront of their minds."

At Natural Pet NW, Zachow draws customer interest with an entire endcap display.

"We have a prominent endcap totally devoted to dental health, featuring dental treats, chews, toothpaste, brushes, gels and more," Zachow said. "We stress that good, healthy chewing is not only great for dental health, but is also a great stress relief."

Tullivers carries a few brands of dental chews that are either potato or rice flour based and contain healthful ingredients, Hutchins said. Offerings include Dancing Paws' Breath-A-Licious Green Bones, Ark Naturals' Breath-less Brushless-Toothpaste and a bulk line of individual Whimzees dental chew treats, which come in alligator and hedgehog shapes, from Paragon Pet Products.

"We talk to our customers and get to know their pets, feeding, 'treating' habits and preferences, and help them find the healthiest selections for their lifestyle and pet," The Whole Pet's McQuade-Heyes said. "We thoroughly research all the products we carry before we will sell them. Additionally, we regularly publish pamphlets, post on Facebook, and distribute an email newsletter with advice on pet products, helping customers understand product ingredients, healthy pet habits and training."

## What's in a Bully?

When purchasing dog chews, today's pet owners look for products that are long lasting, natural and safe. One of the most popular chews that fits that list is the bully stick, or pizzle stick. Yet, according to a study conducted by Lisa M. Freeman, a professor of nutrition at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, some pet owners don't know the source of bully sticks.

It's no secret that bully sticks are raw, dried bull or steer penises, but of the 852 dog owners surveyed online, only 44 percent knew the origin. Surprisingly, only 62 percent of veterinarians knew the source. Furthermore, 71 percent of the people surveyed said they avoid byproducts in pet foods, yet bully sticks are considered an animal byproduct by definition.

The study also reported a higher caloric count than consumers thought. Also, the small sample of 26 tested bully sticks showed bacterial contamination of *Clostridium difficile*, one with *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and seven with *E. coli*.

About the study's findings, Freeman said in a statement, "We were surprised at the clear misconceptions pet owners and veterinarians have with pet foods and many of the popular raw animal-product based pet treats currently on the market."