



Grain-Free Diets and Dilated Cardiomyopathy

By Robert Ulbrich, VMD

Recently there has been concern raised about grain-free diets causing a type of heart disease called Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM). To help clarify what the concern is and whether it is justified, I looked up the paper printed in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (December 1, 2018, Vol. 253, No. 11. Pages 1390-1394: "Diet-associated dilated cardiomyopathy in dogs: what do we know?").

Quoting from this article: "... we have heard from veterinary cardiologists who had an impression that they were diagnosing DCM ... at higher rates than expected Subjectively, it also appeared that these dogs were frequently eating BEG diets...." A "BEG diet" refers to "boutique, exotic protein, grain-free" diets, and can include any diet sold in boutiques (i.e., any small retail store specializing in high-end pet products," diets containing "exotic" protein sources (anything other than the usual common pet food protein sources such as beef or chicken) or diets that don't utilize grains.

This one quote raises several points:

1. It's not just "grain-free," but that is the part of BEG diets that everyone is jumping on.
2. An article using words such as "an impression that," "subjectively," and "appeared that" and drawing any sort of conclusion from what follows should *never* be accepted in a scientific journal.
3. The fact that these dogs were "frequently eating BEG diets" only means that these diets have been increasing in popularity. Dogs without DCM are also more frequently eating these diets. Correlation does not equal causation.

More quotes from this paper:

"...not all cases have been confirmed to be linked to diet, and a true association has not been proven to exist."

"... the apparent breed predispositions suggested that genetic factors, breed-specific metabolic abnormalities, or low metabolic rates may also have been playing a role."

"BEG diets have increased in popularity in recent years, and many dogs with DCM unrelated to diet and many dogs without DCM are likely eating these diets."

"... the apparent link between BEG diets and DCM may be due to the grain-free nature of these diets ..., possible nutritional imbalances, or inadvertent inclusion of toxic dietary components. Or, the apparent association may be spurious."

"Notably, however, some dogs improved after a diet change from one grain-free diet to another, and this finding, along with the differences identified between dogs fed various BEG diets, suggested that DCM was not necessarily tied to the grain-free status of the diet. Taurine

supplementation was prescribed for many of these dogs despite the lack of apparent deficiency, and it is unclear what role taurine may have played in their recovery.”

“Although DCM in some dogs without any apparent taurine deficiency appears to be reversible with a change of diet, with or without taurine supplementation, no cause has thus far been identified for non-aurine-associated DCM.”

The bottom line is that some dogs eating BEG diets develop DCM, and some dogs that eat grocery-store pet foods also develop DCM, and some dogs that eat BEG diets don't develop DCM, and some dogs that eat grocery-store pet foods don't develop DCM, and it makes no sense to blame DCM on BEG diets because of the first group while ignoring the other three groups. Further, it makes no sense to conclude that it is the grain-free subset of BEG diets that are causing the problem, even if there was a true correlation between BEG diets and DCM. And finally, just thinking about this logically, if grain-free diets cause DCM, why are all the wolves and coyotes in the wild, who aren't eating grains, not dying from heart disease?

So don't worry about grain-free diets. There is no proof whatsoever that they are a problem, and lots of evidence that they are superior. This whole issue smacks of cheap, low-quality pet food manufacturers targeting smaller companies who are putting out superior products that Big Pet Food is losing money to, trying to drive them out of business rather than increasing the quality of their own products in order to compete.

For more information: https://petempiressupplies.com/blogs/pet-food/dcm-update?fbclid=IwAR0zpMYIA8fbUFhuYFr7SMMVMs4sHL_nBeTXnPjWSWqfphHeK5AEjPseW6o