A Response to a Throwaway Line

We can’t resist responding to what appears to be a casual reference in Delta Society’s “Raw Protein Diet Policy.” The following statement opens the policy’s “frequently asked questions and answers” section on Delta’s website:

Q: “What exactly are the scientific facts?”

A: “The use of raw animal proteins to promote animal health has not been based on proven or known scientific facts, only anecdotal incidents.”

In fact, health claims for raw diets have not been scientifically disproved. For the most part, they have simply not been tested. They are likely to remain untested because without substantial funding, even the most interested researchers are unable to conduct large-scale clinical trials.

One exception is a study conducted in the 1930s and 1940s by Francis Pottenger, Jr., MD. Last year the Price-Pottenger Nutrition Foundation in Lemon Grove, California, published a new edition of Pottenger’s Cats, its detailed report of the study, with restored photos and newly scanned text.

Certified clinical nutritionist David Getoff, the organization’s vice president, explains. “In Dr. Pottenger’s famous experiment, he studied more than 900 cats over a 10-year period, housing them in identical outdoor shelters and feeding them the same foods – a diet consisting of two-thirds meat and one-third milk plus cod liver oil – while observing their health and behavior as they ate that food either raw or cooked. Some cats received raw meat and raw milk, some received raw meat and heated milk, and some received raw milk and cooked meat.

“The cats that consumed everything raw had good bone structure and bone density, wide palates with plenty of space for teeth, and shiny fur. They had no parasites or disease and reproduced with ease and gentleness, and they got along well with other cats in their enclosure.”

Just a few feet away, the cats fed cooked meat or heated milk suffered from skin diseases, allergies, soft bones, reproductive problems, infant mortality, adverse personality changes, parasites, hypothyroidism, and other degenerative diseases.

Dr. Pottenger kept detailed records of each cat’s health from adoption or birth to death, including autopsy reports.

“Today’s veterinary feeding trials don’t begin to do what Dr. Pottenger did,” says Getoff. “His study proved beyond a doubt that on a raw diet, cats thrive. There’s no reason to assume that dogs are any different. The original Pottenger cat study, which we keep in print along with a video covering Dr. Pottenger’s work, is just as relevant today as when it was completed in 1942.”

Since its publication almost 60 years ago, Juliette de Bairacli Levy’s Complete Herbal Handbook for the Dog, which describes her natural rearing philosophy, has influenced generations of dog lovers around the world. Of the 230 breeders listed at a natural rearing website (see “Resources Mentioned in This Article” page 15), most feed an all-raw diet, and many require puppy buyers to do the same before they will guarantee the animals’ health.

Many members of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association also recommend raw diets for dogs and cats.

Ian Billinghurst, the Australian veterinarian who wrote Give Your Dog a Bone and introduced the BARF (Bones and Raw Food or Biologically Appropriate Raw Food) diet to the world 20 years ago, didn’t conduct formal studies, but he observed that when processed pet foods were introduced to his country, the health of his patients declined. When their owners returned to traditional methods of feeding raw meaty bones and table scraps, the dogs’ health improved.

Richard Pitcairn, DVM, PhD, immunologist and author of the best-selling New Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats, recalls, “When I began to suggest the feeding of raw meat, I found animals becoming more healthy even without other treatment. Since that time, other veterinarians have told me similar things about the use of raw meat. My experience, albeit clinical and not based on studies, is that my patients have improved health on a raw diet. Dogs and cats, being carnivores by nature, are meant to eat raw meat and do not have a problem doing so.”

Many who feed raw consider their diet choice a safety issue, for they have complete control over the source and quality of their ingredients. They point out that a commercially prepared diet cannot protect dogs from all pathogens; significant numbers test positive for Salmonella, E. coli, Clostridium difficile, MRSA, and other harmful bacteria despite their cooked-food diets – and the recurring problem of pet food contamination has produced several of the human and canine illnesses that cooked or commercially prepared foods are supposed to protect against.