# Transitioning pets to vegan diets could slash environmental impact by 30%



A recent review has illuminated the significant climate impact of pets, particularly dogs and cats, suggesting that transitioning them to plant-based diets could substantially mitigate this footprint. The study, led by Billy Nicholles from Bryant Research and Professor Andrew Knight from the University of Winchester, reveals that pets contribute to about 10% of the meat consumed globally, with this figure soaring to 20% in affluent nations such as the UK and the US. Notably, an alarming 30% of the environmental effects of livestock farming have been traced back to pet diets, underscoring the urgent need for a dietary shift.

The researchers examined 21 different studies, scrutinising the role of both meat- and plant-based ingredients in commercial pet food and exploring alternative protein sources such as cultivated meat and microbial proteins. Their findings underscore the high emissions linked to pet food production, particularly through manufacturing processes which are among the most carbon-intensive. In fact, diets based solely on wet pet food were found to generate nearly eight times more emissions than dry food, an insight that raises concerns about consumer preferences and the prevailing notions of pet health.

An overwhelming factor contributing to the environmental impact is the heavy reliance on animal byproducts, which, while often viewed as waste products, account for approximately 53% of pet food ingredients. These byproducts—think bones, meat meal, and other non-human food sources—actually may result in higher overall emissions. The study notes that using these byproducts requires significantly greater quantities of livestock than equivalent human-grade meat. This has led to a counterproductive situation where the demand for byproducts has, paradoxically, increased the number of slaughtered animals, worsening the environmental toll.

Despite historical scepticism surrounding the nutritional adequacy of vegan pet food, a growing body of evidence is reshaping this narrative. Research has consistently demonstrated that nutritionally balanced plant-based diets can be both safe and beneficial for cats and dogs, sometimes even leading to better health outcomes than traditional meat-based diets. The implications of this transition extend far beyond animal health; the environmental benefits could be monumental. For instance, a broad adoption of vegan diets for pets could save land equivalent to Mexico and Germany combined, while potentially reducing greenhouse gas emissions by over 0.09 gigatonnes of CO₂—more than the emissions produced annually by New Zealand.

Innovative solutions such as microbial proteins and cultivated meat have also emerged, demonstrating the potential to further lessen the environmental impact of pet food. Research indicates that cultivated meat for pet food could cut emissions by as much as 95% compared to beef, making it an attractive alternative to traditional sources.

As awareness grows, various experts suggest proactive policy measures to foster this dietary transition. Educational campaigns aimed at pet owners could address issues like overfeeding and food waste, emphasising the surprisingly large carbon footprints of conventional pet diets. Encouragingly, the British Veterinary Association has softened its stance on plant-based pet food, acknowledging its viability.

The authors of the review advocate for strategic steps, such as gradually transitioning pets to a 50% vegan diet, asserting that even a partial reduction in meat consumption could lead to significant environmental benefits. Ultimately, the call to action is clear: shifting towards sustainable, plant-based alternatives in pet food is not merely an individual choice but a collective responsibility that promises to lessen the environmental impact of the burgeoning global pet food industry.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/), [[2]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/17/wet-pet-food-is-far-worse-for-climate-than-dry-food-study-finds), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/17/wet-pet-food-is-far-worse-for-climate-than-dry-food-study-finds)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ciwf.org/media-news/opinions/2025/01/can-pets-be-vegan-heres-how-much-it-would-help-the-planet), [[5]](https://www.ciwf.org/media-news/opinions/2025/01/can-pets-be-vegan-heres-how-much-it-would-help-the-planet)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/), [[3]](https://www.ciwf.org/media-news/opinions/2025/01/can-pets-be-vegan-heres-how-much-it-would-help-the-planet)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/if-all-dogs-and-cats-went-vegan-we-could-feed-520m-people-lower-emissions-and-conserve-land/), [[2]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/17/wet-pet-food-is-far-worse-for-climate-than-dry-food-study-finds)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/), [[2]](https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/vegan-pet-food-climate-change-dog-cat-emissions/> - This article discusses a recent review highlighting the significant climate footprint of pets, particularly dogs and cats, due to their meat consumption. It emphasizes that shifting pets to nutritionally sound plant-based diets is the most effective way to mitigate their environmental impact. The review, conducted by Bryant Research’s Billy Nicholles and University of Winchester’s Prof Andrew Knight, analyzed 21 studies on pet food ingredients, animal byproducts, and emerging innovations like cultivated meat and microbial proteins. The authors advocate for urgent adoption of measures to reduce the dietary 'paw prints' of companion animals.
3. <https://www.ciwf.org/media-news/opinions/2025/01/can-pets-be-vegan-heres-how-much-it-would-help-the-planet> - This article explores the environmental benefits of feeding pets, particularly cats, vegan diets. It highlights that pet cats consume one billion land-based food animals annually, and adopting vegan diets could eliminate greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 0.09 gigatonnes of CO₂, more than New Zealand’s annual emissions. The piece also discusses the inefficiencies of using animal byproducts in pet food, noting that demand for these byproducts increases the number of livestock animals killed, thereby exacerbating environmental impacts.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/17/wet-pet-food-is-far-worse-for-climate-than-dry-food-study-finds> - This article reports on a study revealing that wet pet food has a significantly higher environmental impact than dry food. The research, conducted by Brazilian scientists, found that wet diets for dogs and cats result in nearly eight times more greenhouse gas emissions than dry diets. The study attributes this to the higher percentage of animal ingredients in wet food and suggests that transitioning pets to plant-based diets could substantially reduce their carbon footprint.
5. <https://www.ciwf.org/media-news/opinions/2025/01/can-pets-be-vegan-heres-how-much-it-would-help-the-planet> - This article examines the environmental impact of pet diets, particularly focusing on the consumption of animal byproducts. It highlights that around 75% of animal-based ingredients in pet food are byproducts of human food production, such as ears, snouts, and internal organs. The piece challenges the assumption that using these byproducts reduces environmental impact, suggesting that the demand for them actually increases the number of livestock animals killed, thereby exacerbating environmental issues.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/17/wet-pet-food-is-far-worse-for-climate-than-dry-food-study-finds> - This article discusses a study that found wet pet food has a significantly higher environmental impact than dry food. The research, conducted by Brazilian scientists, analyzed various diets for dogs and cats and found that wet diets result in nearly eight times more greenhouse gas emissions than dry diets. The study attributes this to the higher percentage of animal ingredients in wet food and suggests that transitioning pets to plant-based diets could substantially reduce their carbon footprint.
7. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/if-all-dogs-and-cats-went-vegan-we-could-feed-520m-people-lower-emissions-and-conserve-land/> - This article explores the potential environmental benefits of feeding pets, particularly dogs and cats, vegan diets. It highlights that transitioning all pet dogs to plant-based diets could save an estimated 0.57 gigatons of CO₂ each year, more than the United Kingdom's emissions in 2023. The piece also discusses the potential to free up land larger than Mexico’s total area, which could be reclaimed for habitat restoration, enhancing both biodiversity and carbon storage.