

## THE USE OF RAW MEAT FOR PET DIETS

The practice of feeding raw animal tissues to companion animals is becoming increasingly common. The so-called BARF diet (Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods) has public health implications about which veterinarians should be aware. Concern about this practice has prompted comments from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which recently announced the availability of draft guidance for industry on the manufacture and labeling of diets that contain raw meat, or other raw animal tissues, for consumption by companion and non-companion animals.

The draft FDA guidelines were prompted by the increased use of raw meat animal foods by owners who may not be aware of the safety and nutritional issues involved, and to protect pet owners and pets from risks involving food safety and nutritional deficiency.

Diets for carnivorous and omnivorous animals containing raw meat or other raw animal tissues have been on the market for many years for use by zoos, mink farms, dog racing facilities, and other professional establishments. Some of these products may have included meat and other tissues from mammals or poultry that have died other than from slaughter or have otherwise been unfit for human consumption.

Although objective data derived specifically from commercial raw meat pet foods are sparse, the potential for risk to public health from such products is significant given the microbiological results from studies of ingredients that could compose such products, and the limited sampling of commercial raw pet foods. These same microbiologic risks may also affect the health of the animal. Additionally, the physical form of ingredients may pose a safety concern. When bone is included in animal feed other than ground form, there is an increased risk of dental or gastrointestinal trauma.

The Public Health and Food Safety Committee of the WVMA as well as the Wisconsin Division of Public Health recommend caution in the use of raw meat as food for companion animals, and strongly discourages its use for animals owned by pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals. Such products can serve as sources of bacterial pathogens (e.g., *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, *E. coli* O157:H7) as well as parasites (e.g., *Toxoplasma*, *Taenia* spp.) which can affect both humans and their pets. Veterinarians are urged to discuss the potential risks to human health with their clients who are known to be feeding such diets to their companion animals.

The FDA draft guidance may be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.fda.gov/cvm/guidance/dguide122.pdf>