

Has Brexit caused an increase in vegan dogs?

By Josh Loeb

SOME vegan dog food companies have experienced a rise in interest in their products after travellers from Great Britain were banned from bringing meat and dairy products into the EU as personal imports after Brexit, industry insiders say.

Since 1 January 2021, when the Brexit transition period ended, people travelling from Great Britain to the EU have been prevented from bringing with them any amount of meat or dairy or their derivatives as non-commercial consignments.

Under the agreement the UK and EU signed on Northern Ireland, the same applies to movements from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

The rules mean many types of pet food cannot now be taken to continental Europe by those from Great Britain travelling with their pets, posing a problem for those wishing to bring with them supplies of their dog's regular food.

To avoid problems, some have opted to acclimatise their dogs to a vegan diet ahead of travelling, according to vet Arielle Griffiths, who works for Just Be Kind Vegan Dog Food, an online shop offering teleconsultations for dog owners wanting to transition their pet to vegan food.

'I sell a veterinary dermatology 100 per cent plant-based diet and I suddenly had owners contacting me wanting help with transitioning their dogs to a plant-based diet as they were planning on taking their dog on holiday with them and realised that they could not travel with their normal meat-based pet food,' Griffiths said.

'The new regulations...state that "personal imports of meat and milk or their derivatives are no longer allowed". This means you cannot take [into the EU] any types of dog foods or treats containing meat or meat derivatives.'

Samantha Crossley, marketing director at Lily's Kitchen, a



company that sells a range of dog food marketed as vegan, also said there had been a recent rise in interest in these products among pet owners and 'page views of our vegetarian and vegan categories and the products within these categories are up 157 per cent year on year. The number of customers buying recipes within these categories is also up by 181 per cent year on year'.

The BVA does not recommend feeding a dog a vegetarian or a vegan diet, but its president Justine Shotton acknowledged recently that there had been 'a lot of media interest' in the issue. A study published in *PLoS ONE* last month suggested vegan diets were healthier and safer for dogs than conventional meat-based diets (<https://bit.ly/38xEXSo>).

Wanda McCormick, head of animal agriculture at Hartpury University, said: 'In principle there's no reason why a dog couldn't do well on a vegan diet, but the thing is we don't have enough evidence.'

Of the prospect of owners switching dogs to such a diet so as not to fall foul of EU import rules, she said this could be a 'useful strategy' for some.



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EU rules governing what can and cannot be brought in from Great Britain since Brexit have also added to the complexity of sending diagnostic samples into the bloc, meaning it takes longer to obtain some test results.

At a BVA council meeting on 20 April, zoo vet Fieke Molenaar said: 'For diagnostic samples, it's been an absolute nightmare... Something needs to be done because diagnostic samples cannot go out to the EU in a timely manner that makes sense. It's not just dogs and cats but a wide range of species that need to be alleviated from some of this bureaucracy if possible.'

Responding, BVA senior vice president James Russell expressed little optimism about the prospect of the EU easing the bureaucratic burden.

He emphasised that Great Britain was now regarded as a 'third country' by the EU and said 'the challenge we face is it's not for the exporting country to determine what the importing country should accept as its criteria'.

He also said the EU was 'not minded necessarily to make life easy for us'.

He added: 'We see that even things like vitamin D3 [tablets], which I think are two stages removed from the original animal derivative that they came from, are still being subject to export health certificate checks. So I think volume and order of risk aren't necessarily arguments that are going to run through.'

Zoos are also understood to have had trouble exchanging animals with counterparts in the EU as part of captive breeding programmes, with concerns this could have an impact on the genetic health of captive populations of some species. Exporters of high-health livestock for breeding also reportedly face having to send animals on longer journeys to the EU because of an absence of the requisite border inspection facilities at Calais. ●