

The Whole Dog Journal

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“Mass Market” Pet Food Companies Taking Aim at the Holistic Segment

[Ainsworth Pet Nutrition a good example of recent industry trend toward better foods.](#)

As we have noted previously, the “natural/holistic” segment of the pet food market is experiencing more robust growth than any other segment. So, more and more “mass market” pet food makers are experimenting with new products developed to compete in this niche – although, in our opinion, only some of the products can walk the walk; many lack true commitment to the concept. One of the best indications of the company’s dedication to quality is the ingredients panel.

Recently, we received a press release from Ainsworth Pet Nutrition of Meadville, Pennsylvania. The name is new, though the company is not. Ainsworth was organized from the core of Dad’s Pet Care, a family-owned business since 1933. Historically, Dad’s foods are what we would characterize as carb-heavy foods sold for bargain prices. But the management wants to change that. “We have made several acquisitions and investments to expand our capabilities and have added exciting new products to our portfolio,” says Sean Lang, CEO of Ainsworth and the great-, great-grandson of Dad’s founder. In the past few years, the company purchased Hampshire Pet Products (an organic certified facility for baked food and snacks), Targeted Pet Treats (maker of snacks and chews), Gaines of Canada (chews and dental bones), Arkat Animal Nutrition (pet food maker with its own manufacturing facilities), and Back to Basics. That last purchase was the one that pricked up our ears.

Back to Basics has had dry dog foods on our list of “approved” dry dog foods for many years. It was a small company with mostly regional sales. When we heard that a mass market company bought it and planned to reformulate its products, we feared the worst, but resolved to follow up to learn its fate.

Happily, it appears that Ainsworth plans to use Back to Basics as its foot in the door of the premium (a.k.a. natural/holistic) dog food market. The Back to Basics foods (there are only two varieties, one pork-based and one turkey-based) are now grain-free (and potato-free); each features fresh organ meat as its first ingredient. Ainsworth says the foods contain 74 percent animal-based ingredients (protein and fat). Both exceed Whole Dog Journal’s selection criteria for a top-quality dry dog food.

Ainsworth has assigned each of its products to one of three divisions. The Dad’s Pet Care division will make Dad’s products, Rachel Ray’s Nutrish, and other mass market foods. The Ainsworth Custom division will be devoted to co-manufacturing and development for other companies. And Ainsworth Specialty Brands will make Back to Basics – and some new premium foods currently in the research and development phase. We’re pleased to see companies like Ainsworth devote themselves to healthier foods; it’s “all good” for our dogs. – Nancy Kerns

For more information:

Back to Basics Pet Food
(800) 219-2558; backtobasicspetfood.com



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