

## FEEDING RAW AND NATURAL FOOD TO DOGS

By Fern Sargeant

My decision to feed raw and natural food to my dogs has been slow in materialising and was hampered by my initial lack of experience and what was available. Today we have much more choice and what I feed is easily obtainable and I believe strongly that it is the right thing for my dogs.

I bought my first collie, a Border collie, back in the 60's, having had very little previous experience with dogs. I was not given a diet sheet from the breeder so I mainly relied on advice from friends on what to raise him and feed him on as he matured. As a result his main diet became tinned meat and dog biscuits with odd treats for the rest of his life, his life span being approximately 12 ½ years.

After a pause I bought my first Rough Collie and though she was never shown, bred a litter from her, kept two bitch puppies and was persuaded to show them. I had just stumbled across a supplier of raw and I have to say, very smelly tripe and thought I would give it a go, adding it to the tinned meat. The dogs went mad over it and working on the principle 'that a little of what you fancy does you good', it became a permanent part of their diet and still is. These days though, the tripe is well washed to do away with the smell.

In those days I had ponies and at feeding time I began to gather a circle of expectant dogs which had developed a taste for accidentally dropped bits of raw carrot. I later found that some of them had a taste for raw apples as well. This got me thinking. Dogs evolved in the wild, eating only what they could catch or find and obviously they must have remained physically fit to do this and to reproduce their young.

So I started to investigate sources of natural dog food which could be obtained from abattoirs. To begin with I found cooked beef in joints which needed cutting up and which I fed with minced tripe and biscuits for a long time, having eased off the tinned meat. However with a change of abattoirs I moved on to raw beef and then with an increased number of dogs, eventually changed to raw beef chunks which didn't need cutting up, adding minced tripe, raw chicken wings and mixer biscuits.

I later on added poultry breast chunks to the menu for some of the dogs as these chunks have no fat on them, which is useful for those whose weight needs watching. I weigh every meal to ensure they get the amount they need, however, there is an old saying in the horse world – 'the eye of the master feedeth the horse' and I think it applies to dogs as well.

Nowadays I use beef mince because it takes less time to prepare. With regard to the bones in chicken wings, I was assured on good authority that it is the cooked boned which are dangerous to dogs. The bones, if raw are safe and the dogs consider them a special treat – you only have to listen to them crunching them up with great glee. The added bonus is that they are very good for helping to keep their teeth clean.

Each bowl gets a few squirts of Omega Oil as a general conditioner and I add a glucosamine tablet as they get older from about 5 years old onwards to maintain supple joints.

I also add a teaspoon of a calming mixture of herbs that I make up myself, that can be bought at any reputable herbal shop, if I become aware that a dog is anxious or stressed for some reason. The mixture consists of equal quantities of Camomile, Lemon Balm, Vervain, Lime Flowers, Skullcap and Valerian.

### **ROUGH GUIDE TO QUANTITY**

#### **Bitches**

Tablespoon of Minced Tripe

Tablespoon of Minced Beef

1 small chicken wing or ½ large wing

Total Weight = 12 oz.

Add cupful of Mixer Biscuits

#### **Dogs**

Table spoon of Minced Tripe

1 ½ tablespoons of minced beef

1 or part of a larger chicken wing

Total Weight = 16 oz.

Add cupful of Mixer Biscuits

If adding poultry breast chunks, reduce the amount of tripe and beef accordingly. More recently, when I have had any spare, I have mixed in a spoonful of lightly cooked root vegetables, chopped up and found they liked them.

As an afterthought, one of the best ways I know of restoring the appetite of a dog which has been sick or off colour is with wild rabbit, which has a better flavour for dogs because of the natural food they live on, fed cooked or raw. I keep one in the freezer just in case.

I recently worked out the average life span of our dogs and found it to be around 13 ½ years, the oldest reaching 15 ½ and I am convinced that the diet they are on has to have contributed to their general good condition and bouncy state of health.