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Bitesize Insights: Wet Pet Food

By Rick Houtepen, product manager wet pet food at IQI Trusted Petfood Ingredients

Wet pet food plays an important role in providing a nutritious and palatable diet for pets. With its high moisture content and soft texture, it supports hydration and is easy to consume. As pet parents increasingly look for high-quality, natural, and health-promoting options, the wet pet food segment continues to evolve in response. This Bitesize Insights paper explores the current market, key trends shaping the segment, and the role of functional ingredients in helping manufacturers meet both industry challenges and consumer expectations.

Wet pet food is a steadily expanding segment within the global pet food industry. Valued at USD 25.4 billion in 2023, it is expected to reach USD 31.7 billion by 2028, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.5%. This growth reflects the increasing demand for high-quality, nutritious, and palatable pet food, particularly in regions such as North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific.

Within the segment, several subsegments continue to develop, including established sterilized wet pet food formats such as cans, alu trays, and pouches, as well as emerging formats like fresh (refrigerated) and raw /frozen formulations.

	Conventional formats	Emerging formats
Formats	Cans, Aluminum trays, Pouches	Fresh/refrigerated Raw/frozen
Shelf life	Long, shelf-stable	Short, requires refrigeration or freezing
Storage & logistics	Room temperature throughout supply chain	Cold chain required (refrigerated or frozen distribution)
Perceived value	Standard, mass-market	Premium, fresher, ‘natural’ positioning
Product innovation	Relatively stable	Rapidly evolving, driven by health and sustainability trends

KEY TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

As wet pet food continues to grow in popularity, a number of important trends are reshaping the segment:

- **Functional foods**
- **Humanization**
- **Premiumization**
- **Sustainability**
- **Growing demand for fresh pet food (human grade)**

Each of these trends brings specific challenges for manufacturers—alongside new opportunities to differentiate through high-quality, traceable ingredients. In the following sections, we take a closer look at each trend. We will discuss the challenges they present and how selecting the right ingredients can support effective solutions.



Functional foods



Pet parents are increasingly looking for food that not only nourishes but also supports specific aspects of their pet's health—such as digestion, joint function, immunity, or cognitive performance. This has led to a surge in demand for functional ingredients in wet pet food that include for example, omega-3s, antioxidants, prebiotics, probiotics, and hydrolyzed proteins. These additions allow brands to position their products as proactive, health-enhancing, and beneficial for the quality of life of pets, moving beyond basic nutrition.



While the base of wet pet food typically consists of fresh or frozen animal or marine by-products, functional ingredients must be added to make specific health and wellbeing claims. To make such a claim, it is essential that scientific evidence is available. The stronger the scientific evidence of a nutrient's benefits, the more powerful the health and wellbeing claim can be.



The health benefits of long chain omega-3 fatty acids (like EPA & DHA) are beyond any scientific discussion. Numerous trials have been performed, and recent literature reviews are available. The origin of omega-3 can be from fish, algae or a combination of both.



Omega-3 fish oil

One of the most impactful functional ingredients for wet pet food is high omega-3 fish oil—a premium source of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA. These nutrients are scientifically proven to support heart health, skin and coat condition, cognitive function, and joint mobility in pets. But not all omega-3s are created equal. The type and purity of the source determine their bioavailability and effectiveness. IQI sources its fish oils for the pet food industry from a range of trusted partners, including some of the world's leading suppliers. All oils are sourced globally, analyzed for nutrient content, and can be refined, deodorized, and blended to meet specific EPA and DHA requirements. By continuously adjusting the mix of raw materials, IQI ensures a stable, year-round supply of highly consistent fish oil.



Humanization



Humanization continues to be one of the most influential forces in the pet food industry. Pet parents increasingly apply human standards to their pets' diets, looking for familiar ingredients, culinary formats, and health claims that mirror their own preferences. In wet pet food, this is reflected, for example, in the use of visible meat cuts and vegetables, recognizable textures, flavors, and labels that emphasize transparency, naturalness, and functionality. The ultimate version of this trend is human grade pet food.



Humanization raises the bar for ingredient selection, product development, and communication. Wet pet food manufacturers must create products that not only meet nutritional standards for pets but also align with human expectations of taste, appearance, and origin. This adds complexity to formulation and sourcing, especially when working with animal by-products or less familiar functional ingredients.



IQI helps manufacturers meet the demands of humanized pet food by providing clean-label, minimally processed ingredients that meet high safety and quality standards. Through transparent sourcing, quality control, and partnerships with trusted suppliers, IQI ensures that ingredients not only perform well in pet diets but also meet the visual and ethical expectations of today's pet parents.



Chicken broth powder

IQI chicken broth powder is a nutritious replacement for water in pet food formulations. Made from human-grade chicken meat and bones, it is gently processed and spray-dried to preserve its natural characteristics. The result is a golden, fat-free, highly soluble broth powder with a protein content of up to 92%—free from salt and flavor enhancers. It adds a rich, meaty taste and visual appeal that pet parents associate with quality and transparency. Chicken broth powder is ideal for wet formulations that aim to reflect home-style cooking and meet the rising expectations driven by pet food humanization.



Premiumization



As pet parents increasingly view their pets as family members, they are willing to spend more on products that promise superior quality, health benefits, and ethical sourcing. This has led to ongoing premiumization in the pet food industry, particularly within the wet segment. Premium wet pet food often features a high meat content, clean labels, recognizable ingredients, and claims related to health, origin, and processing.



Premiumization puts pressure on manufacturers to deliver consistent, high-quality products without compromising production efficiency or scalability. Sourcing premium ingredients that meet strict nutritional, safety, and sustainability standards can be complex—especially in wet formulations, where ingredient integrity and appearance play a key role in consumer perception.

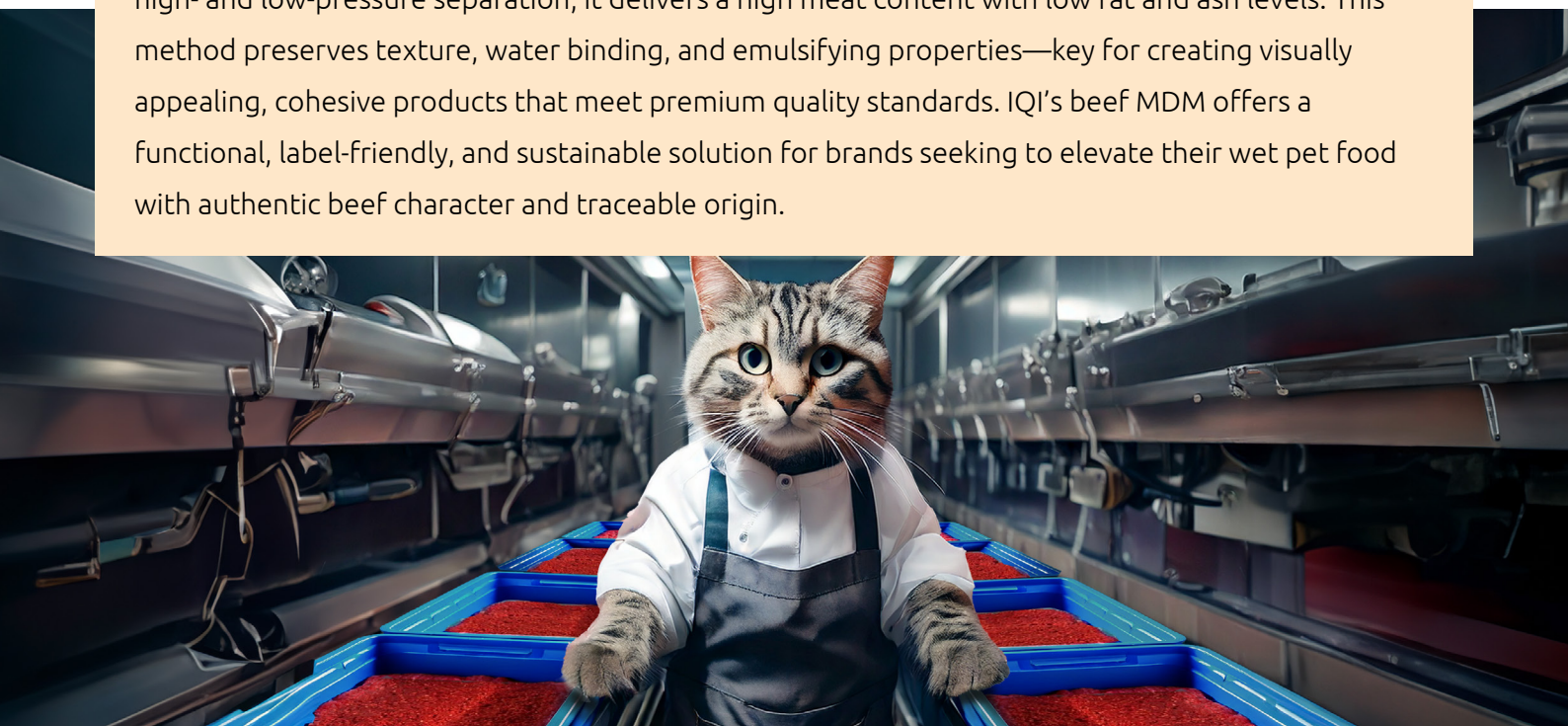


IQI supports premium pet food production by supplying a wide range of high-quality ingredients with a transparent supply chain that align with today's premium claims. This includes animal proteins with high palatability and digestibility, marine- and algae-based oils that are rich in omega-3s, and natural additives with proven health benefits. IQI's quality assurance systems and global sourcing capabilities help ensure that each ingredient contributes to a product that meets the expectations of premium-positioned brands—and the pet parents they serve.



Beef MDM / Baader 3 mm

Beef MDM (mechanically deboned meat) from Baader 3 mm technology is a premium protein ingredient that's ideal for wet pet food brands looking to support “with real beef meat” claims. Produced from fresh Alpenrind beef bones using a combination of high- and low-pressure separation, it delivers a high meat content with low fat and ash levels. This method preserves texture, water binding, and emulsifying properties—key for creating visually appealing, cohesive products that meet premium quality standards. IQI's beef MDM offers a functional, label-friendly, and sustainable solution for brands seeking to elevate their wet pet food with authentic beef character and traceable origin.



Sustainability



Sustainability has become non-negotiable for both consumers and manufacturers in the pet food industry. Pet parents increasingly expect brands to minimize environmental impact through responsible sourcing, reduced food waste, and sustainable packaging. For wet pet food in particular—where animal-derived ingredients and packaging formats play a central role—sustainability is both a challenge and a key opportunity for innovation.



Wet pet food production typically relies on energy-intensive processes and generates packaging waste. Fluctuations in raw material supply and growing pressure to reduce food waste require manufacturers to rethink ingredient sourcing. Creating a sustainable product means balancing environmental impact with nutritional quality, cost-efficiency, and shelf life.



IQI supports sustainability in wet pet food through multiple ingredient strategies. This includes the use of upcycled animal and marine by-products, which help reduce food waste and maximize resource efficiency. IQI also emphasizes traceability and responsible sourcing practices, ensuring that environmental impact is minimized across the supply chain. In addition to these approaches, IQI actively explores novel protein sources that require fewer natural resources and offer a lower carbon footprint compared to traditional meat ingredients.



FungiBite®

FungiBite® is a unique protein derived from fermented fungi. As a mycoprotein-based ingredient, FungiBite® delivers excellent digestibility and a natural flavor that enhances palatability in wet formulations. It is produced using an efficient fermentation process that requires little land, water, or energy - making it a highly sustainable alternative protein. With its functional and nutritional benefits, FungiBite® is well-suited to meet the growing demand for eco-friendly, high-quality pet food ingredients.



Growing demand for fresh pet food



Fresh pet food is one of the fastest-growing areas within the wet pet food segment. As consumers increasingly associate freshness with health, demand for fresh dog and cat food continues to rise. These products appeal to pet parents seeking healthier, high-quality options and are often positioned as a premium alternative to shelf-stable formats. Within the fresh segment, the most premium option is human grade pet food.



This shift toward refrigerated wet pet food creates complex formulation and production challenges. Fresh products have a shorter shelf life and require strict cold chain logistics to preserve safety and quality. In addition, manufacturers must find ingredients that not only deliver palatability and nutritional value but also remain stable and functional under cold storage and limited processing conditions.



Meeting the demands of fresh wet pet food requires ingredients that are not only high in quality and nutritional value, but also compatible with refrigerated production and distribution. As part of the OSI Group, IQI offers access to a consistent and traceable supply of wet and frozen by-products, including fish, lamb, chicken, pork, and beef. These ingredients are tailored to meet the specific requirements of fresh pet food manufacturers—ensuring quality, safety, and supply chain stability.



Dried Beef FP65

Dried Beef FP65 is a clean-label, high-protein beef ingredient that supports both the nutritional value and binding of fresh wet pet food. Produced as a co-product from human-grade beef bone processing, this spray-dried powder contains over 65% protein and forms a natural gel upon heating—making it a clean label, pure beef binder for fresh wet pet food. As part of a sustainable beef valorization process, FP65 enables manufacturers to include real beef components in their recipes while supporting texture, consistency, and label appeal.



DISCOVER IQI'S OTHER SOLUTIONS FOR WET PET FOOD

In addition to the ingredients related to the trends discussed throughout this paper, IQI offers a broad portfolio of high-quality ingredient solutions. These are designed to meet the evolving needs of pets and pet parents around the world. Our portfolio includes ingredients that support functionality, sustainability, premium positioning, and innovative product development. The selection below highlights the variety of options available through IQI and its trusted partners.

Category	Ingredients
Animal ingredients	Lamb, duck, turkey, pork & beef greaves Specialty dried animal proteins Spray dried broths OSI beef MDM & other frozen animal proteins
Marine ingredients	Salmon meal, hydrolysate and oil High n3 fish oil Algae DHA Other frozen marine proteins
Functional ingredients	Chicken plasma IQI dried beef (FP65) Single binders Functional blend binders
Natural coloring	Caramelized sugar Hemoglobin powder Carob powder / tomato pomace Vaess nitrite replacer
Novel proteins	WetPro 15 (yellow mealworm) FungiBite (king oyster mushroom)
Grain-free & plant-based functional ingredients	IQI grain-free solutions IQI potato products Thai sweet potato pellets Green banana powder Miscanthus fiber & pea fiber

CUSTOM SOLUTIONS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Many of the solutions highlighted in this whitepaper are developed through close collaboration with pet food manufacturers and ingredient partners. By working together from an early stage, we're able to create tailored ingredient solutions that meet specific goals — whether that means improving product performance, enabling health claims, or even formulating something entirely new.

Our way of working is built on partnerships. We listen, ask the right questions, and bring together expertise from across the value chain — from ingredient sourcing and processing to functionality and application. The result: tailor-made solutions that fit your formulation, your process, and your promise to pet parents.

As the wet pet food market continues to evolve, so do the demands on ingredients. IQI is committed to supporting manufacturers with solutions that are functional, flexible, and future-ready.

Want to know more?

[The benefits of chicken plasma powder in pet food applications](#)

Learn how plasma contributes to palatability, immune support, and functionality in wet formulations.

[FungiBite®: A mycoprotein-based novel protein for pet food](#)

Discover the sustainable potential of fermented fungi as an alternative protein source.

[The future of wet and fresh pet food](#)

Key trends, challenges, and innovations shaping the next generation of wet and fresh formulations.

[Product leaflet: chicken broth powder](#)

Learn more about the product specifications, unique benefits and how to use IQI chicken broth powder in pet food formulations.

[The benefits of fish oil as a source of long-chain omega-3 fatty acid for pet food](#)

Discover the unique benefits of fish oil as a direct source of EPA and DHA long-chain omega-3 fatty acids.

[Beef MDM](#)

Discover more about the benefits of mechanically deboned meat.

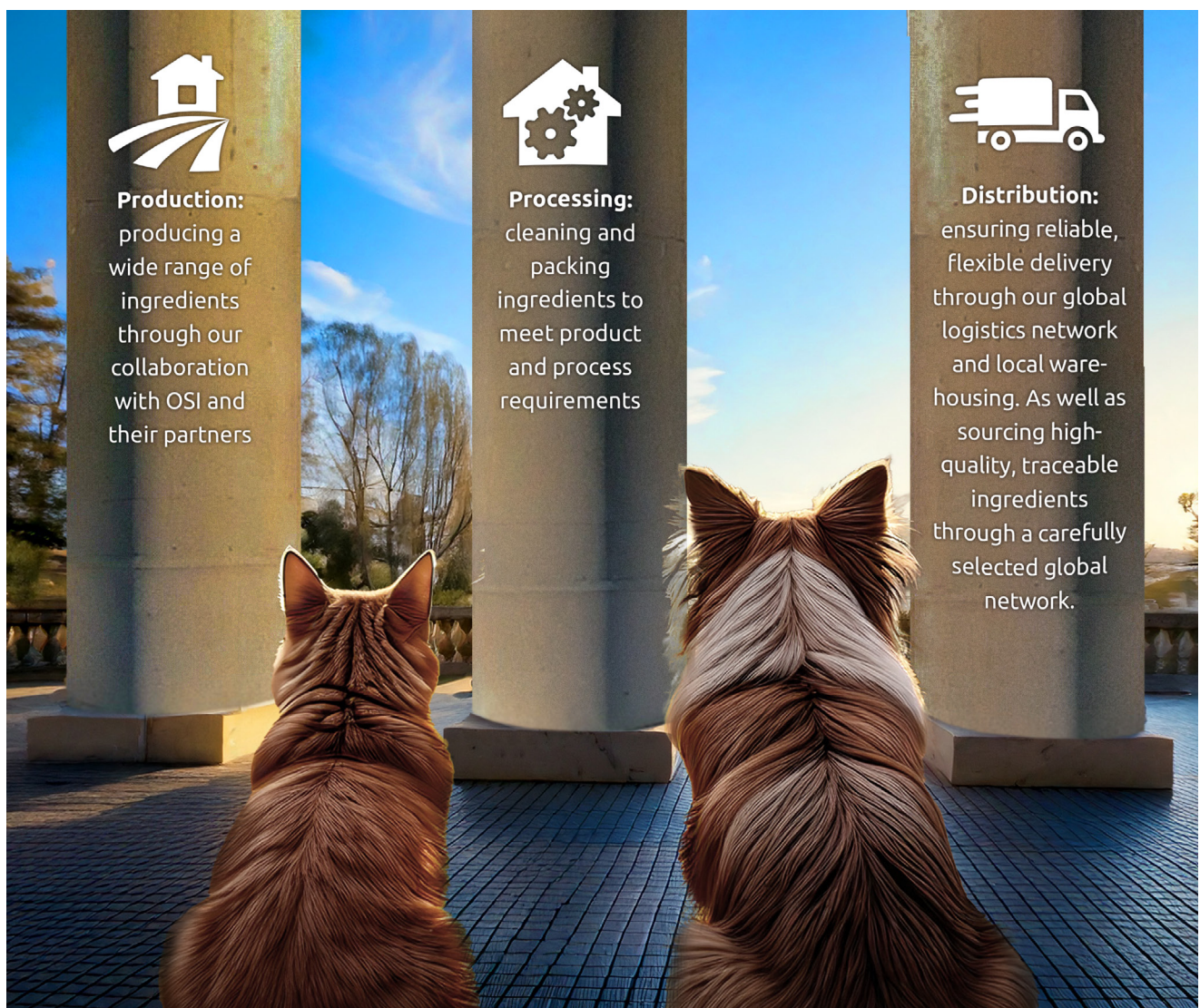
ABOUT IQI TRUSTED PETFOOD INGREDIENTS

IQI Trusted Petfood Ingredients is a global distributor of premium-claim ingredients to the top brands in the pet food industry. Founded in 1994 as a trading company in raw pet food materials, today IQI offers an extensive variety of services to aid and assist our customers and suppliers worldwide.

IQI Trusted Petfood Ingredients employs highly skilled personnel, owns and operates a global network of logistical hubs, including cold store, and relies on a global supply network to obtain the purest natural resources available.

IQI's three core pillars

At IQI, we go beyond supplying premium ingredients — we support every step of the journey from source to shelf. Our approach is built on three core pillars:



These three pillars reflect our commitment to quality, consistency, and partnership — helping our customers create products that meet the highest standards in today's dynamic pet food market.

Quality is key

IQI Trusted Petfood Ingredients goes to great lengths to ensure the integrity and quality of its products and develop innovative new products. IQI also invests a great deal in maximizing the quality of its partnerships. Since this business is all about trust, IQI needs to bond with its partners to succeed. By working closely with both its customers and suppliers, IQI creates full transparency in the supply chain. IQI oversees and controls every step in the process from source to shelf and supplies products that are pure and traceable to their source.



ABOUT RICK HOUTEPEN

Rick Houtepen works as a sales and product manager at IQI Trusted Petfood Ingredients. Next to his many years of experience in the meat industry, where he acquired extensive knowledge as well as certificates of and around meat, he brings lots of energy, expertise, and know-how in the wet pet food segment to the IQI team. Rick appreciates working closely together with his colleagues, always driven to seize opportunities in the industry with high-quality pet food ingredients for cats and dogs.

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