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**Survey: Impact of environmental sustainability on dog owner's decision-making on feeding preferences in Switzerland**

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## Survey: Impact of environmental sustainability on dog owner's decision-making on feeding preferences in Switzerland

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**Introduction.** Environmental sustainability (ES) is a trending topic with increasing popularity as the environmental ecological “paw print” dilemma grows exponentially in modern society [1]. The concept of ES in pet foods might have an impact on dog owners' feeding inclinations and decision criteria [2]. We hypothesized that dog owners' feeding preferences, differ between six age groups of visitors at a dog exhibition and are essentially related to the interest owners manifest in feeding environmentally sustainable diets (ESDs) to their dogs.

**Animals, materials, and methods.** The survey was conducted at an annual dog exhibition in Switzerland. Three multiple-choice questions were asked about the applicant (AP) and two additional global questions, were performed via a preference scale, ranging between 1 and 5 (where 1 and 2 were ranked as irrelevant, 3 as middle relevant, and 4 and 5 as very relevant). The first global question included the owner's feeding preferences (e.g. homemade cooked, BARF, commercial dry, commercial wet, or mixed diets). The second global question involved other arguments for these feeding preferences (e.g. healthiest option) and ultimately, ES as influential decision criteria for these feeding preferences. ESDs were conceived as manufactured (or prepared) with sustainable ingredients (e.g. regional, grain-free) and based on eco-friendly production (e.g. focused on environmental protection). No previous information about ESDs was provided to the AP. 216 AP completed the survey of which aged 18 (8.3%) <25 (G1), 67 (31%) 25-35 (G2), 31 (14.3%) 35-45 (G3), 49 (22.6%) 45-55 (G4), 39 (18%) 55-65 (G5), 12 (5.5%) >65 (G6) (set age groups). About 87.5 ( $\pm 4$ ) % (average  $\pm$  standard deviation) of AP owned a dog. 25%, 20.5%, 16.6%, 11.9%, 10.2%, and 9.6% of G6, G5, G1, G2, G4, and G3 respectively, were professionally involved with dogs (e.g. breeder or dog sitter).

**Results and discussion.** Unless indicated, descriptive statistics were calculated per age group. To define the inclusion of feeding preferences variables, only variables with average values above 3 on the preference scale were included. The feeding preferences per age group were as listed, a mixture of commercial and raw ingredients for G1 (with an average of 3.3 on the preference scale). Commercial dry food for G2, G3, G4, and G5 (with an average value on the preference scale of 3.4, 2.9, 3.0, and 3.5 respectively) and a commercial mixture of dry and wet food for G6 (with an average value of 3.3 on the preference scale). All age groups based their feeding preferences significantly on choosing the healthiest option for their dogs (with an average value of 3.5 on the preference scale). The inclusion of ES as decision criteria of interest; was estimated through a simple linear regression model per age range and feeding preference. G1 feeding preference was explained on a 37% to ES as decision criteria of interest. Groups G2, G3, G4, and G5 feeding preference showed no relationship to ES as decision criteria of interest (-6.8 %, -15 %, for G2 and G3 and -24 % for G4 and G5 respectively), whereas G6 feeding preference was slightly related (0,9%) to ES as decision criteria of interest.

**Conclusion.** The results of this survey contradict partly the initial hypothesis. Owner's feeding preferences are directly related to ES as decision criteria of interest only for G1. In contrast, all other age groups' preferences were based on other decision criteria (e.g. healthiest option). The concept of ESDs is possibly poorly understood and requires additional clarification [3]. Further use of age groups categories in similar studies is recommended due to apparent preference variance between generational groups

**References.** [1] Alexander et al. (2020) *Glo. Env. Cha* (65): 102153; [2] Swanson et al. (2013) *Adv. Nutr.* 4: 141–150; [3] Conway & Saker (2018) *Front. Vet. Sci.* 170(5): 1–8.