

STUDYING POOP FOR GOLDEN DOG FOOD

PhD student Evelien Bos (24) is working with dogs and their owners on a new protocol that pet food companies can use to develop their products. The dog contributes poop, which the owner collects for two weeks and stores in the freezer.

In her PhD project, Bos wants to establish a common protocol with which dog food producers can analyse the quality of their products, making use of the experiences of dog owners and their pets. This has never been done before. Pet food companies usually test the quality of their products on lab animals. They judge how palatable the food is by the amount the animals eat, and its digestibility by how many nutrients they absorb. Now, Bos wants to test the palatability and digestibility of the product in the dog's home environment. This is important since every dog is different, and so are its living conditions, which can cause more variation in the results of quality control than occurs in a research facility. Bos: 'I've got one foot in fundamental science, and one in applied science. I like being able to work with pet owners and their animals alongside the lab research.' Bos has now started the first of six planned studies, in which she focuses on digestibility. To determine this, she needs to analyse the poop.

FROZEN PIZZA

All the participants in Bos's trial receive a two-week supply of plastic bags in which to collect the faeces, and a diary in which to record their observations. She also offers participants a mini freezer, as not everyone fancies storing the poop samples next to their frozen pizzas. For the two weeks of the trial, participants can

give their pets only the food Bos provides, and are asked to make notes in the diary. In return for the free food, she wants to know how much of it the dog eats and how often it poops. And she wants to know about the faeces in gory detail, so she can identify possible digestion problems. Bos picks up the samples after two weeks.

LAB WORK

And then the lab work begins. A pet's poop reveals a lot about its health. The nutritional value of the food depends on its digestibility. 'All the nutrients we find in the poop were not absorbed by the dog,' says Bos. 'So if the food is well digested, leaving few nutrients in the poop, that digestibility is a good marker for the quality of the food.'

With her PhD project, Bos wants to determine the time period and the number of participating dogs needed for reliable, animal-friendly quality control that leads to healthy and tasty food. She has worked with 50 dog owners so far and she is looking for at least 10 more. After this, Bos would like to investigate the quality of cat food. **KH**

Are you interested in taking part in this study? If so, go to <http://www.betterpetworld.com>

Not everyone fancies storing dog poop next to their frozen pizza



RECTORS: GENERATION OF STUDENTS AT RISK

The rectors of Dutch universities fear that students may not be able to develop to their full potential if teaching hours remain limited. In an editorial, they advocate for more provision for students.

'Character development is the basis of university education, and we fear that an entire generation of students will be lost if the cru-

cial face-to-face contact is not restored soon', write the rectors of 15 universities on the news and opinion website ScienceGuide. For the time being, universities and colleges can only offer courses that start and end between 11 am and 3 pm, or after 8 pm. This is to avoid students travelling during rush hour. Classes may also begin before 3 pm

and end after 8 pm.

The options will be expanded from 1 August, but the rectors fear this will still be insufficient. 'With a view to the future, we need to offer the next generation of students space, both literally and metaphorically. They too deserve a place of their own, even now.' **HOP**