

EDITOR'S

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The pet food industry has a lot on its mind going into 2024



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Happy New Year! It's 2024, and that means new trends, new challenges and new opportunities to keep top-of-mind for the next 12 months. Once again, I asked around the industry — analysts, manufacturers, suppliers, packagers, transportation specialists — to get the top trends we'll be talking about this year, and boy is there a lot to discuss.

Trending: Consumer influence

The way consumers treat their pets has evolved, and that's what the industry is laser-focused on right now. Health and wellness (p. 16) are forefront as pet food formulators look for ways to provide complete diets that will help animals live their best lives. Over in treats and supplements, the focus is on not just treating ailments, but preventing them entirely, as well as helping pet parents maintain their pets' health and improve pet longevity from the very start.

E-commerce (p. 18) is another trend to watch this year, as customers settle into their new shopping patterns and very strongly favor an omnichannel approach. Whether pet owners want the in-store experience, curbside pickup or direct-to-consumer delivery, retailers and manufacturers alike are expected to step up and be everywhere. The reward? Hopefully, according to the industry, where accessibility starts, loyalty follows.

Then, of course, there's sustainability (p. 20), which for the third year in a row has a place as a top industry trend going into the new year. Its continued presence on our annual lists is also an exercise in watching the idea of sustainability evolve over the years, from "I need my packaging to be recyclable" to "I need to know where these ingredients are from" to "I need to know what your company is doing to be a more sustainable business."

A busy year ahead

I don't know that anyone expects 2024 to be an uneventful year. With global instabilities abounding, the industry still regaining its footing from the last few years, and consumers trying to stretch their money as far as possible, it will be a year of decisions made. It may be 2025 before things fully shake out, but it's safe to say this year will keep us all on our toes.

Good luck! ■