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In 1950, pet supply manufacturers and wholesalers met for the first Animal Crackers Inc. trade show put on by the World Pet Association (WPA). Fast forward 70 years and the show is still thriving, but has had some location and name changes. Most notable was in 2000, on the show's

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Animal Crackers Inc. trade show returns to Vegas after 1-year hiatus

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In 1950, pet supply manufacturers and wholesalers met for the first Animal Crackers Inc. trade show put on by the World Pet Association (WPA). Fast forward 70 years and the show is still thriving, but has had some location and name changes. Most notable was in 2000, on the show's

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50th anniversary, when the name was changed to SuperZoo. It wasn't until 2004, however, that the show was moved to Las Vegas, Nevada in order to draw more national and international attendees. Though there have been changes to the show over the years, one thing remains the same: SuperZoo is a place for the pet industry to gather to connect, learn and do business.

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Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic forced trade shows to rethink how people could meet, but without compromising safety; the solution was a virtual show. Luckily as the world returns to normalcy, this year's show will be held in-person at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas, August 17 to 19, with education sessions beginning August 16.

"Pet industry professionals have a serious passion for their business and the community, which is why we're eager to bring everyone back together for SuperZoo 2021 after being apart for so long," said Vic Mason, president of WPA, in a February press release announcing open registration for the show. "With health and safety top of mind, we are working directly with the city of Las Vegas and the Mandalay Bay Convention Center to safely reconvene the pet retail community in August."



With a myriad of exhibitors coming together after a one year hiatus, the WPA has organized the event by product and topic to enable the most efficient use of time and space, with curated neighborhoods such as: Critter Alley where you can discover everything you need for aquatic environments, small animal habitats and feathered friends, Farm & Feed the spot to browse all the latest from pet and livestock feed brands that reach hobby farmers, rural lifestyle consumers, commercial farms and farmer cooperative retailers, Health and Wellbeing which has the newest in pet supplements and animal health, Nature's Pathway where you can explore the latest in health and wellness products for a wide range of pets, Rodeo Drive where source products are craved by new pet owners and inspired by the latest trends and Innovation Incubator which will feature the innovators shaking up pet retail.

In addition to the exhibits, SuperZoo offers an educational curriculum that covers the challenges in the industry; pet retailers and service providers can count on sessions at SuperZoo to learn how to maximize e-commerce and pet food delivery trends, access the latest strategies to draw traffic to their stores and websites, use POS to manage and automate inventory, train employees with best practices and remain relevant and able to adapt to changing times. With the educational program

kicking off a day before the trade show, there will be plenty of time for groomers and retailers to dig in to the topics that matter most to them with a retail education pass/grooming education pass or a retail and grooming education pass.

There is no better place than SuperZoo to stock your shop and gain years of business training in four short days," said Mason. "But at the heart of it all, we're just thrilled to be back together again. There's no better community than the pet community, and SuperZoo 2021 is going to truly celebrate that. If you're a pet pro, then you belong to this August."



Duckyworld, maker of catnip products, is planning on showcasing a number of products at this year's SuperZoo to make up for lost time. Kris Kaiser, marketing specialist at Duckyworld, is excited for the show as "nothing beats being able to see our customers in person to share in the excitement of new products and the show environment."

"We are looking forward to meeting with our retailers and customers face to face. We have loads of exciting new products, displays and store décor to help you boost sales in your cat section," Kaiser added.

DuckyWorld closely works with private farmers to grow, manage and harvest the best organically grown catnip. No chemicals or pesticides are used in cultivation, which means Yeowww! Catnip is completely safe for cats and humans. Made in the U.S.A., these toys are made with "high quality cotton strong enough to withstand as much scratching, biting, bunny-kicking and slobber a cat can dish out," according to its website.

Duckyworld products are also designed with safety in mind. There are no strings, plastic pieces or polyfill in its toys that can be accidentally ingested during play. Cat owners can rest assured that their pet is safe when playing with a Duckyworld product.

Those attending SuperZoo can expect to see several newer items Duckyworld released this year including the Chi-CAT-a Banana Peeled that was released in March, followed by a Pineapple toy in May and Kitten Mittens product line in July.

Kaiser said, "Our newest product line is Kitten Mittens, available in three bright colors, a three-pack header card as well as a countertop display jug. Like all Yeowww! Catnip toys, Kitten Mittens come fully stuffed with our own organically grown catnip."

Retailers should note that Yeowww! Catnip toys were designed to grab customers' attention on store shelves. Bright colors, fun shapes and unique marketing will help draw customers to the cat section.

Over the years the health and wellness trend has spilled over into the pet space, and has shown no signs of slowing down. Pet owners are recognizing their pets need, and deserve, high-quality products that benefit their long-term health and can also aid in managing any ailments.

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"Pet parents continue to look for new and innovative ways to maintain the best overall health for their pets," said Scott Reinhardt, vice president of sales and marketing at Swedencare USA. "We anticipate this to be an ongoing trend influencing the pet industry in the development of a full spectrum of high-quality products with the goal of promoting overall pet health and longevity."

Over the last 20 years the industry has seen a steady incline of knowledge and awareness of companion animal dental care. Veterinarians have emphasized the importance of canine dental care and have, in turn, created a demand from pet parents for better and more convenient dental care.

In a July 2021 interview with Pet Age, Marvin Shimko, CEO of Swedencare USA explained that Proden PlaqueOff Powder works in a unique way as it works against the bacterial film in the mouth.

“This biofilm is a major cause of the dental issues that pets face. While other pet dental products only rely on abrasive action or use harsh chemicals to kill bacteria, Proden PlaqueOff does not change the bacteria levels in the mouth,” said Shimko.

Exhibiting at SuperZoo this year, Swedencare USA intends to display new flavor extensions of PlaqueOff System Dental Care Bones mini size, along with its complete Proden PlaqueOff powder line. In addition, the company plans to unveil a new product that further promotes the health and wellness trend.

“We are excited to introduce our new grooming collection of luxury skin and coat shampoos and therapeutic wipes [and get] back to face-to-face conversations with our key retailers, distributors and new business partners,” said Reinhardt.

Canidae is another brand that is committed to making quality products to better pets’ lives, but also the lives of people and the life of the planet. The company began producing food in 1996, and has since invested in its own pet nutrition plant in Brownwood, Texas.

Canidae's Sustain line is the company's most sustainable pet food to date, featuring premium recipes made with responsibly sourced proteins, such as Cage-Free Chicken, Wild-Caught Alaskan Salmon, Upcycled Brewers Yeast and ingredients grown through regenerative farming methods. Recipes include a nutritious blend of vitamins and minerals including probiotics, Omega-6 and Omega-3 fatty acids to support healthy digestion, skin and coat. The product line is also made with the environment in mind as it has the highest PCR percent packaging available in pet food. PCR, or post-consumer resin, is an environmentally sustainable solution for reusing single-use materials that would otherwise be disposed of in landfill sites.

At this year's SuperZoo, Canidae is showcasing a different, newer product line, Canidae CA, which features six new nutritionally dense, premium formulas with increasing levels of protein to deliver different optimized solutions for different dogs’ needs. Kathleen Lévy, senior brand manager at Canidae said, “The CA product line is really designed for dogs of varying activity levels. We have three different products within the line and it's a product that's been in development in partnership with a vet nutritionist. We really focused on the No. 1 ingredient being real meat, poultry and fish.”

In addition to being full of real protein, Canidae CA also contains wholesome grains like oatmeal, millet, sorghum, barley and brown rice, to promote long-term gut health and give dogs a complete and balanced diet so they can lead a long and healthy life. Canidae is dedicated to independent pet retailers so this line is exclusively found at local pet stores, and the company is finalizing promotions including a coupon and a free toy with purchase.

First started in 1966, Phelps Pet Products has begun to shift its focus from being a “me-too/low-

priced” private label contract manufacturer to becoming a trend-driven, innovation leader in the dog treats market. Rick Ruffolo, CEO and president of Phelps Pet Products said, “Within the last three to five years, the company has invested in being clean label, innovating on ingredients and benefits from a functional perspective. The company proved it was serious about the change when it was first-to-market with 100 percent plant-based (meatless) jerky dog treats, and became the first dog treat manufacturer to be a member of the Upcycled Food Association. The Phelps Private Brand Collection, a one-of-a-kind program for the independent pet retailers, was also created to allow retailers to carry “own brand” dog treats without the cost of R&D, feed testing, packaging development or high MOQs.

Table Scraps, the product that Phelps will be showing at SuperZoo, further promotes the company's new vision. Table Scraps is a line of dual-branded dog treats that brings the Magic of Disney to dogs of all shapes and sizes. The line, which is made in the U.S.A., includes eight different “clean-label” recipes that feature beloved Disney characters such as Pluto, Stitch, Winnie

the Pooh, Baloo the bear and more. Pet owners can choose from recipes that include USDA-certified organic varieties, Marine Stewardship Council certified salmon bites, upcycled ingredients and 100 percent plant-based jerky treats.

Pet nutrition is at the forefront of SquarePets operations. The family company was started six years ago by Peter Atkins and his two sons, Tyler and Travis, and launched its initial offerings in October 2019. SquarePet created its Veterinarian Formulated Solutions (VFS) product line with the belief that poor health and diseases are directly tied to deficiencies in this environment. SquarePet formulations supply the appropriate molecules from nature to the dog and cat which support their body's inherent self-protective and self-healing ability resulting in longer, healthier and happier lives.

Since releasing the initial VFS products, SquarePet has added three additional formulas: VFS Low Phosphorus Formula, VFS Ideal Digestion and VFS Active Joints. Co-founder Travis Atkins earned his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine degree and worked as a family practice and emergency medicine veterinarian before stepping into business with his brother and father to create these products. Tyler Atkins, co-founder and chief sales and marketing officer at SquarePet, explained how his brother's experience aided in the creation of the various VFS products.

"[The VFS line] is my brother's brain child," Tyler Atkins explained. "Him being a veterinarian by trade he would always be in the clinic wondering why he had to write prescriptions for foods that could be offered over the counter. Trying to target those conditions that we can make diets for and offer it to the masses was the impetus behind the line."

An important factor in creating these diets was the idea that no fillers, or "foo foo" ingredients as the company calls it, were used. Each ingredient in every SquarePet formula serves a specific nutritional and/or health purpose. Wholesome ingredients are used while chemical preservatives, artificial flavors and artificial colors are left behind.

It's key that retailers are knowledgeable about the products they carry and brands should be providing materials so store employees can educate customers.

"We've put efforts behind having resources, presentations, videos, brochures and POS materials that retailers have access to," Tyler Atkins said. "We actually created the pet food solution center and displays for retailers; it highlights information on the [VFS line] products. Even if a retailer doesn't have the knowledge, say it's a part time employee, they can walk over to that solution center and be able to guide [the customer] in the right way."

Educational materials for retailers is essential especially when the product line is a newer innovation product such as food and treats made with insect proteins. Jiminy's creates dog food and treats made with cricket protein as it aims to reduce the environmental impact of pet meat consumption. According to the company, if a pet owner switches from a chicken-based diet to an insect-based diet, like Jiminy's, it saves 480,000 gallons of water a year.

"We're all about fighting climate change," said Jiminy's founder and CEO Anne Carlson. "And it's

small choices, even with your pets, that can make that happen. I used crickets for the first products; they're the gateway bug. Since then we've expanded into other insect types as well. They all bring great sustainability, but also great nutritional benefits. Considered a superfood, insect protein meets or exceeds the Association of American Feed Control Officials requirements." Jiminy's launched its insect-based dog food last year right as the

COVID-19 pandemic began. Because of the cancellation of the in-person show in 2020, Carlson was unable to meet with industry professionals to showcase what Jiminy's has to offer. A year

later, Carlson is gearing up for SuperZoo and is looking forward to the opportunity to not only talk about the newest product, a training treat, but to also talk about Jiminy's dog food. She said, "We'll be showcasing the dog food which [has] two varieties, Good Grub and Cricket Crave. We've also got a new training treat that is called Good Grub Peanut Butter and Cranberry."

The Peanut Butter and Cranberry is the company's first chewy training treat made from grub protein, which is a natural and sustainable protein. These treats feature wholesome ingredients like peanut butter, cranberries and oats with less than three calories per treat and contain no corn, wheat, soy or other fillers .

Although Jiminy's uses alternative proteins, the company ensures that its products are as delicious and nutritious as they are sustainable and hypoallergenic. Carlson's great dane, who is a picky eater, serves as a taste tester so his reaction is one way she is able to understand the palpability of the treats during testing.

The excitement and hype around SuperZoo this year is unlike any other. Hundreds of well-respected brands, including A&E Cage Company, Supreme Petfoods and Indipets, are eager to showcase their latest product launches. In turn, retailers will be on hand to learn more in order to carry them in their stores for their ever-demanding customers.

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