



Natalie Guillén/The New Mexican

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# Animal scientist

## *Research leads nutritionist to his calling*

**By Julia Bell**  
For The New Mexican

Richard Patton, 60, loves animals. As a child he gravitated toward them, and as an adult he makes his living working with animals. He studies animal digestive systems, how to keep the environment safe around animals and how different elements in food can impact animals' lives. His research, which spans almost 40 years, allows him to advise people what to feed their animals.

After many years as a scientist studying all kinds of animals, Patton began to realize that his own dogs were dying of natural causes earlier than they should.

Examining the nutrition in animal diets, he discovered that many of the dry foods for cats and dogs contained an excess amount of soluble carbohydrates such as corn and rice. Soluble

carbohydrates induce the blood sugar to spike and the body to compensate by producing large amounts of insulin. This is similar to what happens in human diabetes. Eating like this for many years takes a toll on the body, he said.

Patton said our animals can eat like we do. He recommends purchasing canned food with less corn and rice, natural diets and frozen or freeze-dried diets.

Despite the recent national scare over poison found in pet foods, Patton said the pet-food industry's quality assurance is better than having no regulations.

The pet-food industry does need to change some of its practices, he said. But some of the changes would entail new machinery, and producers have invested millions of dollars in the machinery they now use.

The death of many dogs in the recent poisonings saddened Patton. But he is

also sad about the 50,000 animal deaths every year on U.S. highways.

Growing up in the home of a scientist and a professor, Patton was drawn to academics. But he found some aspects of science boring, so he chose to become an animal nutritionist. This profession incorporated his love for academics and his passion for animals, not to mention his desire to be a cowboy.

"Animal nutrition gave me the chance to be a cowboy and a scientist at the same time," Patton said. "It was a perfect fit filled with adventure."

Patton began his journey into the world of animals, science and food in 1968, when he earned a bachelor's degree in animal sciences from Pennsylvania State University. This was followed by a master's degree in reproductive

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# Animal: Nutritionist finds way too many carbs in dog food

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physiology from Purdue University in 1970 and a doctorate in animal nutrition from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 1972.

As a scientist, Patton always was thinking about the environment as well as nutrition. His first research project involved raising healthier cows through better nutrition. Understanding that insects were a source of nutrition, he began growing cockroaches on cow manure and then feeding the insects to cows.

Patton discovered that cows were able to digest the insects.

"In the world, we destroy one-third of everything that we grow due to insects getting in our rice and grain bins," he said. Insect waste infiltrates organic substances, creating filth that prompts molds to grow.

"In the United States, if you open some rice and see insects in it, you would throw it away," he said. "In Third World countries they do not have the luxury of waste. So they would probably pick out the insects, then eat it."

After graduate school, Patton went on to work in the field of animal-nutrition research. Since 1980, he has consulted for hundreds of businesses. Clients over the years have ranged in size from 25-cow family farms to multinational corporations.

His emphasis has always

been on keeping animals healthy, with quality ingredients as the foundation.

Patton has also helped position company products for the marketplace, always with a focus on benefiting the animal and the animal's owner. He has become a leading expert in organic minerals in animal nutrition and a pioneer researcher in nutrition during late gestation.

His line of work has allowed him to travel and spend time with many exotic animals.

"Animals have a much wider range of intellect than we do," he said. "We can learn a lot from animals because they operate on a level that we have virtually lost — intuition, instinct and pheromones. Pheromones are any chemical or set of chemicals produced by a living organism that transmit a message to other members of the same species. There are alarm pheromones, food-trail pheromones, sex pheromones and more."

Although Patton has worked with many animals, including polar bears, camels, cows, horses and tigers, two gorillas leave a mark in his mind. During one of his trips to the Denver Zoo, Patton saw how the intelligence of two gorillas played a role in their survival instincts.

"We were dealing with a female gorilla with fertility problems," he said. "She needed

to be anesthetized. She began to realize that when she was not fed the day before, a procedure was going to take place. Immediately when we would come in, she would grab the anesthetizing gun and bend it into a pretzel. Then she would pick out the tranquilizer darts

from her companion. When we decided to anesthetize the female first, the male would pick up the female gorilla and use her as a shield so he would not receive a dart."

With so many adventures and experiences, Patton is grateful to be using his knowledge

in the work that brings him so much joy. He brings his passion for animals into his life every day by owning dogs, cats and horses.

Although Patton has traveled all over the world, he finds peace in his home in Galisteo with his wife, Elayne.

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