

# Better Hydration, Better Health

Pet watering systems combine hygienic benefits, innovation and practicality.

By Janet Randall

When retailers' cash registers are high and dry, innovative pet watering systems can be tools for boosting revenue. During the holiday season, a key to sales is educating consumers about the health benefits of these products.

"Feeding our pets has evolved from putting both a food and water bowl on the garage floor," said Ben Clark, owner and president of Simpet Solutions Inc. and Farm Innovators Inc., manufacturers based in Plymouth, Ind. "We now know there's a much cleaner, healthier way. Our patented product, Feeding Friend, is a combination feed-and-water system that was designed to make caring for pets simpler."

The indoor-outdoor product dispenses food and water in one unit while addressing the universal concern of keeping food ant-free. A center pole above the water reservoir elevates the food and creates a moat—the "primary line of defense" against bugs, according to Clark.

Another offering on the watering market is Water Dog, manufactured by Contech Enterprises Inc. in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. One of its distinguishing features is a sonar sensor, which makes the item "presence activated," according to Mark Grambart, the company's president and CEO.

"The sensor in the Water Dog sends and receives waves that detect when the dog is there and when he leaves," Grambart said. "Our product provides a continuous source of cold, clean running water. Back in primal days, dogs

preferred drinking running water from streams. It's cleaner and healthier than standing water."

A running-water system can also offer a solution to pet owners whose animals refuse to drink from standing-water bowls, as it did for Dr. Mary Burns, a veterinarian and the inventor of the Drinkwell Pet Fountain, which is manufactured by Reno, Nev.-based Veterinary Ventures Inc. She developed the fountain as a result of her cat's refusal to drink any water that didn't come from a dripping faucet, according to the company's website. As a veterinarian, Dr. Burns was well aware that cats need sufficient water intake to maintain healthy function of their kidneys and urinary tracts.

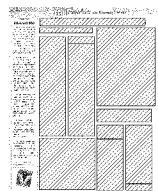
A filtered watering system for pets could be an ideal gift for people who wouldn't think of drinking tap water themselves.

"We will introduce our newest Drinkwell model this holiday season," announced Sean Rowe, president of Veterinary Ventures. "It's stainless-steel, which is aesthetically more pleasing and goes better with home décor, particularly in the kitchen, where the product is often placed. And it addresses the issue of natural allergies some cats have to plastic."

Another gift option is Contech's Drink Better water bowl, created for dogs who gulp their water.

The bowl design compels slower ingestion by limiting water flow.

"Slowing dogs' drinking has several benefits," Grambart noted. "It minimizes their swallowing air, which reduces gas, and less water means less splashing and less mess."



"We know customers buy our products as gifts," Grambart continued. "Our sales data shows that people who buy our products often come back and buy more to give to their friends.

It's viral marketing; our customers feel compelled to share."

The universal applicability of watering systems also plays a role.

"Automatic waterers are practical for holiday giving because every pet owner could use one," said Gina Mirolli-Crespo, manager of RetailPets.com. "All dog and cat owners want to provide their pets with state-of-the-art products."

However, does practicality lead to more purchases?

"We actually do sell more watering systems for pets during the holidays than at other times of the year," said Kevin Howen, general manager of Petland in Rockford, Ill.

"Our most popular waterers are Fresh Flow by Petmate, and Dogit and Catit by [Rolf C.] Hagen [USA Corp.]," Howen reported. "During the holiday season, we do an endcap of our best-sellers and gift wrap them or just add a bow. It makes an easy decision for a last-minute gift."

Innovative products can always make thoughtful holiday gifts. From low-tech heated bowls for outdoor winter use to high-tech bowls with computer chips and water filters, watering-system options abound to fit every pet owner's need. ■

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## **Auto Feeding/Water Dispenser Purchases in 2008**

(past 12 months)	<b>Cat</b>	<b>Dog</b>
% of owners who purchased item	8	6
# of households w/pet	38.2 million	45.6 million

Source: 2009-2010 APPA National Pet Owners Survey



COURTESY OF GREG HUFFMAN/ CONTECH ENTERPRISES INC.

**Sonar sensors in pet watering systems can help save water by turning water on when the pet is near the device and off when the animal is away from it.**



COURTESY OF SIMPET SOLUTIONS INC.

**Products that combine pet waterers with automatic food dispensers are designed to offer convenience to pet owners and serve as an alternative to standard food and water dishes.**