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Hooch for the Pooch

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VetScript Editor's pick - December 2017

They make innovative, award-winning beers and now the clever brewers at Wellington-based **Garage Project** have turned their hands to dog biscuits. Jacqui Gibson reports on the creation of a new treat for man's best friend.



A man and his dog walk into the pub for a beer – you've probably heard that one before, right? But have you heard the one where a man and his dog walk into a Wellington brewery for an award-winning IPA (that's India pale ale, for the uninitiated) and a bag of yummy dog treats? No? Well, here goes.

Right now, Wellington-based brewery **Garage Project** is on a mission to sell beer-loving dog owners a new treat product for dogs called **Mashbone Brewery Bites** with every beer poured. **Mashbone** Business Manager **Kalen Acquisto** explains:

“When dog owners come to the cellar door to grab a premium-quality beer, we want them to pick up a bag of our super-nutritious dog treats at the same time. At **Garage Project**, we love experimental beer and we love to reward our very own **Garage Project** dogs with the best-quality treats. We know many of our customers feel the same way.”

In October **Garage Project** took out the country's top prize for beer-making. At the time, **Brewers Guild of New Zealand** Chair **Jonathan Alve** made special mention of the company's reputation for making beers from unusual ingredients and using experimental techniques.

It's this same innovative approach that led **Garage Project** to develop Mashbone Brewery Bites, according to Kalen. She says the idea initially came about as an answer to a problem. Based at a former petrol station in Wellington's Aro Valley, **Garage Project** produced huge vats of malted barley mash every day as a by-product of the brewing process. They gave it away either to community gardens for compost or to farmers as stock feed.

"One day," says Kalen, "Jos, one of the founders who owns two of the company's four dogs, was like, 'Surely we can put this waste product to better use. What about a dog biscuit?' One thing led to another – as it does in this place – and we came up with a basic prototype made of upcycled barley mash. The goal was to create something like **Garage Project's** beer, a handmade product that's completely natural, premium quality and delicious."

To check they'd got it right, **Garage Project** enlisted the pet food research team at Massey University's Centre for Feline and Canine Nutrition and Institute of Food Science and Technology through a government programme called the Bioresource Processing Alliance. Massey's team, led by Associate Professor Dave Thomas, took seven months to check that the product's ingredients met international nutritional standards and to test and improve its palatability with 30 in-house dogs.

"The literature tells us grain mash is an ideal source of nutrition for dogs," says Dave. "It's high in protein and high in fibre, which is great for gut health and stool formation."

"We used testing to focus on the product itself to make sure the biscuits held together as they should, that the portion size was right for both big and small dogs and that dogs enjoyed the biscuits and felt a desire to consume them."

"We can say we're 100% confident in the product as a treat food, provided it's used alongside a complete and balanced diet."

Today, Mashbone Brewery Bites are made of malted barley mash (with all sugars extracted for beer), premium New Zealand beef and bone, and free range eggs.

The recommended serving is one or two treats per day, depending on the size of the dog.

Hand-manufactured at Rosa Foods in Porirua, the baked biscuits are stocked by more than 100 retailers throughout New Zealand, including veterinary clinics, supermarkets, liquor stores and specialty food stores, such as Commonsense Organics and Farro Fresh Food.

Anna Yallop, who runs the government programme that funded the research, says the product is timely. Latest figures from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) show that the global pet food industry is worth more than \$67 billion annually – a figure that continues to increase every year.

Meanwhile, a 2014 report commissioned by MBIE identified pet food as one of the six best emerging growth opportunity sectors of the New Zealand food and beverage industry. It noted the global trend for pet owners to treat their pets as part of the family, as well as the increasing demand for high quality, premium pet food.

"I think what's most impressed me about **Garage Project** has been the time and energy they've put into product development," says Anna. "In the end, it's taken a few years to get to this point. But they've come away with a high-quality product that not only adds value to a by-product, it's also backed up by some basic science."

Emma Bermingham, a senior research scientist with AgResearch, worked alongside Dave on the project. She says the fact that the product has been researched and made in New Zealand will mean a lot to consumers at home, as well as overseas, should the fast growing company want to export.

"I think for veterinarians and dog owners alike, it's useful to know this product is made entirely from natural ingredients sourced here. That means no fillers, no preservatives. It also means all ingredients are completely traceable."

"With this product, you know exactly who made it and where it's come from, and that should give dog owners and consumers the confidence that they're doing the right thing by their canine companions."