Implication of grain-free foods in the development of dilated cardiomyopathy is an inappropriate over-generalization that tends to obscure the true causative factors.

In 2018, grain-free diets were implicated as a possible causative factor in the development of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM); however, the FDA's anecdotal data was not sufficient for a robust evaluation to ascertain the true causative factor. Champion Petfoods' highly qualified research team collaborated with veterinary cardiologists, animal nutritionists, and vet epidemiologists to develop an appropriate scientific approach to delineating the role of diet, if any, in DCM. Champion worked with a veterinary epidemiological group to review the FDA data and conduct a structured literature review to assess the possible research pathways that may contribute to the development of DCM. Numerous pathways were reported, with only a small number of potential nutrition pathways identified.

Insufficient protein and amino acid digestibility have been linked to DCM. Therefore, the first hypothesis tested was to investigate the digestibility of grain-free foods, particularly total protein and ileal sulphur containing amino acid digestibility. We found that protein and amino acid digestibility were not negatively affected by the presence of legumes at varying concentrations when compared to grain-based food.

Low taurine has been associated with DCM. Therefore, the second hypothesis tested the effect of a grain-free product on whole blood and plasma taurine concentrations in large-breed dogs fed for a period of 26 weeks in a controlled study. This study found an increase in whole blood and plasma taurine in dogs over this period.

There is no evidence in current research that the presence or absence of grain in a dog's diet is the issue or the solution. The findings from our investigations suggest a grain-free diet does not cause taurine deficiency and inadequate amino acid digestibility in dogs, both of which have been linked to DCM.

In looking at nutrition as a potential factor contributing to the development of DCM, it is important to look at specific nutrients, rather than a diet classification, such as grain-free or a category of ingredients, such as legumes. The alleged connection between grain-free foods and DCM is an over generalization that may obscure the specific factors that contribute to or cause DCM. It does not take into account the numerous nutritional differences among products and/or the multiple interdependent factors, such as health, pre-existing conditions, genetics, and metabolism, that contribute to DCM.