

Nature's Dinner Bell

Consider the benefits of feeding your small animal pet a diet resembling Mother Nature's.

By Eve Adamson

Ariana, Becky, Alex and Liesl have a pretty good life. They get a lot of attention and good food, like guinea pig pellets, hay and treats of fresh carrots or juicy apples. Their human family plays with them, talks to them, spoils them and worries that the basement where they live might get too cold in the winter. But wait. Guinea pigs come from the Andes Mountains. It's cold in the Andes Mountains, at least in winter, and often quite dry.

"I keep telling my husband, trust me, it's not too cold for the guinea pigs," said Ellen Dierenfeld, Ph.D., a specialist in zoo and wildlife nutrition and the manager of Sustainability Programs Research at Novus International Inc. in St. Charles, Missouri, a company that formulates feed ingredients for pet food and agricultural feed companies.

"I also tell him that a guinea pig in the wild would never eat a carrot or an apple."

Dierenfeld said that humans tend to put their own perceptions of what to eat onto their small animals, which isn't always appropriate. We tend to give our small animals food we believe seems healthy, but what's healthy for a human isn't the same as what's healthy for a rabbit, a hamster, a rat or a ferret, she said.

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