

Making Pet Food Taste Great

Dr. Mike Ceddia



Jonathan Flowers, AFB Technician, showing how the Selo steam tunnel produces wet pet food and expands our capabilities to help customers trial new product concepts.

AFB International was founded in 1986 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA with a vision to create the best palatants and make pet food taste great. Today the company is international with resource centers and production facilities across the world. The palatant portfolio is formulated to deliver optimal performance for each customer's unique needs. AFB International is a subsidiary of Ensign-Bickford Industries, a privately owned high technology conglomerate, who participate in businesses like pet food science that are relevant to the future of the world and have multigenerational growth prospects.

Dr. Michael Ceddia was recently named as Vice President, Global Research & Development, as well as leader of Global Regulatory, Quality, Project Management and Technical Insights. "Mike brings great leadership experience and strategic customer focus. We are excited for him to join AFB and look forward to

the advancement of innovation, science-based solutions, and technical services to better partner with our customers," said Dale Spence, President, AFB International.

Following up from a warm welcome at the Interzoo fair in Germany, Ian Healey visited AFB International's pilot plant in St. Charles, Missouri to meet Dr. Ceddia and find out much more about palatants and the science behind them.

Please give us an introduction to AFB International and your personal background.

The company partners with pet food manufacturers to make food, treats and supplements for dogs and cats taste great, ensuring pets receive the vital nutrition they need. We develop and produce a full range of liquid and dry palatability enhancers proven to optimize pet enjoyment and consumption. Clearly understanding our customers' complex

needs provides a firm foundation for success.

To determine the best approach, we strive to understand the interaction of the palatant with other crucial factors, our customers manage.

"I have recently joined AFB International and am excited to have the opportunity to be a part of the AFB Global R&D Team. My background is in R&D in consumer products, pet food, nutritional and pharmaceutical companies. I look forward to helping AFB expand our innovation and new product development while continuing to deliver a high level of technical service to our customers. I am eager to bring my knowledge and experience to the team and help drive the company's ongoing growth. With AFB International's commitment to innovation and excellence, I am confident that we will continue to achieve great success together."



Jonathan Flowers (r.), AFB Technician, shows the different types of packaging to Dr. Mike Ceddia (l.) and Ian Healey that can be used for the thermal process retort, which is a food preservation technique.

What are palatants exactly? How do they work?

A palatant is when a protein source is broken down into amino acids, then there is a reaction where acids, sugars, and flavors, along with protein and processing conditions create flavorful compounds for optimal palatability. Palatability is a critical factor in determining the success of pet food products. Palatability is defined as how well food stimulates a pet's desire to eat, and it's measured by how desirable pets find their food. It's a combination of sensory characteristics like taste, flavor, mouthfeel, smell, shape, and texture. Palatability is paramount to pet food sales and brand loyalty, so that's why our customers trust AFB.

Are they mostly used in powder or liquid form?

Both types are essential, and each have their use type to make pet food taste great. Liquid and/or powder palatants are added to the kibble formulation or as topical application after the fat coating.



Can palatants be used to mask other ingredients? For example, medicines or supplements?

Yes, if and only if you have the right combination of flavors. This is particularly useful for pets who are reluctant to consume medications or supplements due to their taste or odor. Palatants can be a valuable tool in veterinary medicine and pet care by helping to overcome taste aversions and ensure pets receive necessary medications or supplements without resistance.

Why are AFB palatants better different than those made by other companies?

We stand out from other palatant companies by partnering with our customers from the beginning. Custom needs are addressed to optimize performance. We also only produce palatants – we are good at it and the dogs and cats tell us.

How does thermal processing affect the flavor, color composition and taste of pet food?

When it comes to wet pet food, the palatants may be exposed to one or more thermal processing steps, such as an emulsifier, steam tunnel, or retort before being consumed by the pet. These thermal processing steps may alter a palatant's color and composition. AFB can produce palatants that are stable during thermal processing. Our pilot plant here in St. Charles, Missouri, USA, provides companies with effective solutions for conducting scale-up production testing without disrupting their product lines. Our newest equipment is the Selo Steam

Tunnel – which produces wet pet food for cans, pouches, and semi-rigid packaging.

In your experience, what expectations do pet parents have from their pet food products or from their suppliers?

Pet parents want their dogs and cats to eat their food and receive the nutrition they need to live their best lives. If the food does not perform, then pet parents see the results - Full bowls of uneaten food! The consumer does not want to throw money away on food that will not be eaten, and they want their dog or cat food product to perform so their pets are healthy. If the pet food tastes good, you have repeat purchases that benefits the suppliers and manufacturers.

Pet parents generally have several expectations from pet food products, which include nutritional balance, ingredient quality, safety and palatability. Meeting these expectations helps pet parents ensure they are providing the best possible nutrition and care for their beloved pets.

Conclusion

AFB has proven to be an expert in making pet food taste good. Empty plates around the globe are a testimony to this. Functional ingredients can provide additional health benefits to cats and dogs. AFB palatants can be designed to successfully deliver these ingredients. Palatants can be meat or non-meat based, depending on desired performance targets, cost requirements and label claims. Palatants can also be developed for diets using novel proteins not - or not yet - commonly found in pet food. The company's success comes from an early and comprehensive dialog with their clients to create an exclusive and often complex flavor profile. The quality and transparency provide a confident balance for their partners. 🐾

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