

**Jason Bailey, Waggers Pet Products Inc.
179 Royal Oak Point NW, Calgary, AB T3G 5C6**

One of Alberta's successful food processing companies, Wagger's Pet Products, has achieved their current place in the market by using only fresh ingredients cooked in small batches. However, their success all began with a virus. According to partner Jason Bailey, the closing of the US border because of BSE in 2003 opened the door for himself and partner, Troy Firth, to start this pet food company with locally grown ingredients. Both he and Troy had senior positions with Nutro-Products at the time, but were given permission to explore other options in the pet food. And, as Bailey says energetically, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) was instrumental in the early success of their dog and cat treat company. One of ARD's many services includes scientific lab testing, and this service was key to the development of Wagger's ingredient profile. Both Bailey and Firth saw an untapped market in healthy food for pets that paralleled the healthy food movement in the human population. They wanted to produce treats that were low calorie, gluten free, and delicious because of the meat content instead of sugar supplements. As well, they added further healthy components, often seen in human health food, of Omega 3 DHA, glucosamine and MSM, for improved joint health. ARD's scientists tested and helped develop the nutritional composition of Wagger's pet treat products to meet the company goals outlined by the two business partners

ARD also provided key support in the early days of introducing Wagger's products onto the market. Bailey describes this aspect of Wagger's timeline and ARD's ongoing contribution, beginning with their incorporation in February 2005, and the launch of Tid Bits in January of 2006, all while working full time at Nutro-Products. In 2009 both Bailey and Firth committed full time to the new venture and constructed a manufacturing facility in Brooks. Not only was ARD instrumental in developing their pet food product, they were also involved on the economic level as well. Business grant programs, product sourcing assistance, and targeted international distribution, were all services provided by ARD staff. Bailey says that it is important to note, however, that despite the many government mandated programs and policies, you are never dealing with a papershuffling bureaucrat when contacting the people ARD. Instead, you develop personal connections with the staff, and they are quick to show up at your place to get a sense of what's happening on the ground. The assistance they provide has always been designed to meet the specific needs of their company, which can change at any given time, according to Bailey. He anticipates that he will continue to draw on ARD resources and expertise as Wagger's Pet Products follows through on plans to scale up the distribution and sales of their product, especially in international markets, while also maintaining a tight network of local suppliers who can maintain consistent supply levels at the top nutritional quality that is the hallmark of their fine pet food products. From the Tid Bits treats of 2006 to the Mighty Lion grain-free cat treats, and Mighty Wolf grain-free dog treats of 2011, Wagger's continues to grow by leaps and bounds, and the people of ARD support that growth through scientific expertise, economic assistance, and local ingredient sourcing.