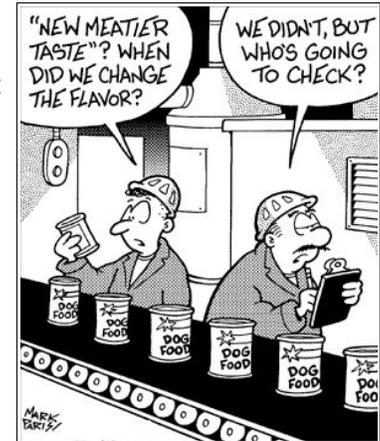


UNDERSTANDING PET FOOD LABELS

NUTRIENTS VS INGREDIENTS:

When choosing an appropriate food it's important to do comparisons of nutrients, not ingredients, on a dry matter basis. This information must be attained from the manufacturer as it will not be on the bag. Remember that nutritional excesses are just as harmful as nutritional deficiencies. That is why choosing a diet that follows the philosophy of lifestage nutrition is so important. Feeding our pets a food for their specific lifestage helps to avoid nutritional excess in the diet. Other important info to look for on the packaging to help make your decision easier are:

1. Is there a number on the bag to call for information on the diet?
2. Do they make their own food or is it made elsewhere?
3. Where do they store their raw ingredients?
4. Do they have Veterinarians on staff?
5. Is the information for the diets based on science or just word of mouth?



THE AAFCO STATEMENT:

When deciding on the right diet to choose for your pet, the first place to look is the nutritional adequacy statement (the AAFCO statement) which tells you a great deal about the food. The basis of the nutrition claim is documented on the pet food label by one of two methods:

1. *FORMULATION METHOD*
2. *FEEDING TRIAL METHOD*

FORMULATION METHOD:

- Simply a laboratory nutrient profile analysis.
- Doesn't require feeding or digestibility trials.
- Less expensive, less time consuming.
- Doesn't account for animal compliance of food or how/if those nutrients are absorbed
- This method is recognized on a label by a statement such as "*Meets or exceeds the minimal nutritional levels established by AAFCO*" or "*Formulated to meet the AAFCO dog nutrient profile for...*" AAFCO nutrient profiles are published for two categories: 1) growth and reproduction and 2) adult maintenance.

FEEDING TRIAL METHOD:

- Manufacturer must perform an AAFCO-protocol feeding trial using the food as the sole source of nutrition.
- Preferred method.
- Documents how an animal performs when fed the food.
- Feeding trials can make claims for 4 categories:
 - 1) gestation and lactation (too high in calories for adult maintenance and senior pets).
 - 2) growth
 - 3) maintenance
 - 4) complete for all life stages. A food that has completed a growth and gestation/lactation trial successfully can make a claim for all life stages.
- The required wording for labels that have passed these tests is: "Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that ____ provides complete and balanced nutrition for (lifestage)."

INGREDIENT PANEL:

The ingredient panel must be shown on the label and is written in descending order by weight. Ingredients are listed on an "as is" basis which makes reading this panel difficult as some ingredients contain more moisture than others. For example, meats contain more moisture and therefore may be first on the list, even though the primary component of the food might be a mixture of grains. Also, the ingredient panel does not provide information about the quality of ingredients. Most companies will "split ingredients" into several different forms so as to allow for the meat source to appear first or higher on the ingredient panel.

MEAT- FIRST FOODS

There is a perception that "meat-first" foods are better. Healthy pets need nutrients and a complete balance of amino acids (proteins). Even in a meat-first food, meat is not the only source of protein available. Other ingredients such as corn can provide protein as well. Dogs and cats cannot store excess protein. The excess protein forces the liver to work harder breaking it down and the kidneys to work harder converting that protein into waste.

Dogs are omnivores and need a balanced diet which can contain proteins from both meat and non-meat sources, as well as carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. Cats are carnivores and it is important that they eat a meat-based diet. However, some of their energy needs and amino acid requirements may come from carbohydrate sources. This is especially important in some prescription diets and restricted calorie foods. Proper formulation is the key to a balanced and digestible diet to meet your pets specific needs.

THE GUARANTEED ANALYSIS:

The guaranteed analysis is a general idea of the nutrient content of a food but is of little value in comparing foods because specific nutrient contents are not given and values are listed on an "as is" basis.

CORN:

Corn is a highly digestible carbohydrate source *when processed* (over 85% digestible) and is more digestible than rice or wheat. The corn that has been put into diets has been ground and cooked so that it can be digested easily. It is a rich source of fatty acids, and has antioxidants which have been shown to reduce the risk of some diseases such as cancer, heart disease, cataracts, etc. It also makes up less than 2% of the reported allergies in dogs. There is no scientific research to support grain-free diets and foods that have grains are just as digestible as grain-free foods. The term grain-free is misleading, as all grain-free foods contain carbohydrates from other sources, such as sweet potato.

BY-PRODUCTS:

By-products are common ingredients in both human and pet foods. It is defined as "something that is produced in the making of something else". Pet food manufacturers may use more expensive highly digestible by-product ingredients to ensure they meet their strict standards. Reputable pet food companies should only be selecting and using by-products that add great nutritional value and taste. These by-products allow for the addition of nutrient-rich organ meats, while avoiding excess minerals from bones that are found in less-expensive meat meals.

WHAT IS "NATURAL, ORGANIC, HOLISTIC OR HUMAN GRADE" PET FOOD?

- **Natural:** According to the AAFCO Officials, the term "natural" requires a pet food to consist of only natural ingredients without chemical alterations, except for the vitamins and minerals.
- **Organic:** "Pertaining to, involving, or grown with fertilizers or pesticides of animal or vegetable origin". This term was legally defined for human foods by the USDA. While final rules have not yet been made, pet food companies can currently use the term "organic" if they follow the same rules as applied to human foods. Foods that are "100% organic" or "95% organic" will carry the USDA organic seal on the package.
- **Holistic:** Has no legal definition. There is no regulation defining what the word holistic means with regard to pet foods.
- **Human Grade:** This term was determined to be misleading by AAFCO. The use of "human grade" or "human quality" is not allowed in pet food marketing unless the food is made in a human food approved plant.