



Myth Busting: Know the Truth Behind Pet Food!



Ingredient Panels: Don't be Tricked!

- **How are ingredients listed?** In order of predominance by weight.
- **What does that really mean?** It means that meat ingredients, that may be heavier prior to processing, often are near the front of the ingredient statement. A meat ingredient such as chicken or beef could include all parts including the moisture. That makes them much heavier prior to processing. Various meat meals & grains, on the other hand, are much lighter & contain little moisture, so often appear later in the ingredient statement.

In addition, the ingredient statement does not provide information about the quality of ingredients. One limitation of the ingredient statement is that terms such as "meat by-products" are difficult to evaluate. The nutritive value of various meat by-products varies widely. For example, meat by-products such as liver, kidney, & lungs have excellent nutritive value, whereas udder, bone, & connective tissue have poor nutrient availability.



Sneaky Splitting

Ingredient splitting is fairly common in the pet food industry. By splitting an ingredient into several different forms, it allows a meat source to appear first on the ingredient panel. Obviously, meat can appear first due to its higher moisture content than other ingredients.

What's in a Word?

Natural

In 2000, AAFCO defined "natural" for pet foods requiring a pet food to consist of only natural ingredients "without chemical alterations." There is no nutritional advantage known to dogs & cats being fed a

natural or organic food. This is a consumer choice, not a nutritional need.

Organic

Does natural mean organic? No. Natural & organic are not interchangeable. Other truthful claims, such as free range, hormone-free, & natural, can still appear on food labels. However, don't confuse these terms with "organic." Only food labeled "organic" has been certified as meeting USDA organic standards. Under new regulations four categories were created for the term "organic":

1. 100 Percent Organic - may carry new USDA Organic Seal
2. Organic - at least 95% of content is organic by weight (excluding water & salt) & may carry the new USDA Organic Seal.
3. Made With Organic - at least 70% of content is organic & the front product panel may display the phrase "Made with Organic" followed by up to three specific ingredients. (May not display new USDA Organic seal)
4. Less than 70 % of content is organic & may list only those ingredients that are organic on the ingredient panel with no mention of organic on the main panel. (May not display new USDA Organic seal)



Holistic

Though there are no legal AAFCO definitions that can applied to pet foods, Webster defines holistic as: concerned with, or dealing with wholes or integrated systems rather than with their parts. That definition could be used to refer to a number of different things, including all pet foods that bring together multiple products, ingredients &/or nutrients to be used as 1 together. The term "holistic" as applied to pet food is not legally defined. There is no legal definition of this term under laws devoted to pet foods. Any manufacturer can make claims of "holistic" in literature & brochures regardless of ingredients chosen.

Human Grade

AAFCO does not permit claims of "human grade." It states: Claims that a product contains or is made from ingredients that are "human grade", "human quality", "people foods", "ingredients you (the purchaser) would eat" "food(s) that you (the purchaser) would feed your family" or similar claims are false & misleading unless the entire product, itself,

meets the USDA & FDA standards for food edible by humans. At this time, the use of "human grade" or "human quality" is not allowed, because these items are not defined.



Life Stages & Feeding Trials

The basis of the nutrition claim is documented on the pet food label by one of two methods:

Formulation Method

- Simply a laboratory nutrient profile analysis
- Doesn't require feeding or digestibility trials
- Less expensive, less time consuming
- Doesn't account for acceptability of food or nutrient bioavailability
- 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 & reproduction & 2) adult maintenance.
- NEVER fed and tested on pets before production

The Feeding Trial Method

- The feeding trial method requires feeding the product to animals. This method is also known as the Gold Standard for determining nutritional adequacy & is the preferred method
- The manufacturer must perform an AAFCO protocol feeding trial as the sole source of nutrition, including required veterinary exams & blood work
- Feeding trials are the BEST way to document how a pet will perform when fed a specific food using AAFCO Standards

ALL LIFE STAGES – Good or Bad?

What do you think the term "all life stages" means? If the label states that the food is for "all life stages", it must provide enough nutrition for the most demanding stage of life. The "growth" life stage is the most nutritionally demanding because the body is growing & burning energy, therefore the food

must contain high levels of nutrients to meet these nutritional demands. How does this affect an adult or senior pet? The food contains high levels of nutrients that, for an adult or senior aged pet, are in excess. Eating a food with excess nutrients can be detrimental to the pet's health.