

## Species - Appropriateness (1-5)

- 1 - Almost exclusively negative qualities
- 2 - More negative than positive
- 3 - Mostly positive with several serious concerns
- 4 - Mostly positive with 1 serious or minimal concerns
- 5 - Almost exclusively positive

**Overview:** Primarily refers to the concentration of animal vs. plant ingredients and the biological value/appropriateness of the majority of the brand's products for cats. Ideal example is high protein, high fat, low carb, high moisture, and has <10 main ingredients (appear on the list before the first nutritional supplement).

### **Positive Influencing Factors:**

- Contains at least 40% dry matter protein
- Contains at least 20% dry matter fat
- Contains no more than 10% dry matter carbohydrate
- Relies primarily on animal protein (ideally meat and poultry, fish will negatively influence rating but not a whole point unless the brand pretty much only offers fish)
- Brand offers wet or frozen food options (ideally only high-moisture foods)
- First source of added fat is animal-based (ideally named, salmon oil vs. fish oil)
- List of ingredients isn't crazy long (fewer than 10 before first supplement)
- Most plant foods are nutritious/digestible (i.e. cranberry vs white potatoes, etc.)

### **Negative Influencing Factors:**

- Plant as the first ingredient or 3 out of top 5
- Relies primarily on plant-based fats
- Dry matter protein under 40% AND fat under 20% (won't necessary take off a full point)
- High carbohydrate concentration (Over 10% dry matter)
- Plant protein concentrates (ex: pea protein)
- Brand primarily offers fish-based formulas
- No high-moisture foods available

## Ingredient Quality (1-5)

- 1 - Almost exclusively negative qualities
- 2 - More negative than positive
- 3 - Mostly positive with several serious concerns
- 4 - Mostly positive with 1 serious or minimal concerns
- 5 - Almost exclusively positive

**Overview:** Primarily refers to the quality of the top 10-ish ingredients. Quality is measured objectively (whole foods vs. fillers) and for the ingredients' nutritional value/digestibility for cats.

**Positive Influencing Factors:**

- Animal protein as the first ingredient (ideally 2 of top 3)
- Relies primarily on animal source of fat
- Only named animal ingredients (no "meat" meal or animal by-products)
- No corn, wheat, or soy products
- Any grains included are whole grains
- No artificial additives and problematic thickeners (gums, carrageenan, etc.)
- Brand specifies where their ingredients come from
- Brand emphasizes ethically and sustainably sourced ingredients
- Brand uses locally sourced ingredients

**Negative Influencing Factors:**

- Vaguely named ingredients or by-products
- High concentration of beans, peas, and legumes
- Corn, wheat, or soy ingredients
- Artificial colors, flavors, preservatives
- Unnecessary ingredients like sweeteners
- Brand doesn't specify where their ingredients come from

**Notes:**

1. Brands using by-products and artificial additives can't score higher than 2
2. Brands using corn, wheat, or soy can't score higher than 2
3. Brands where vaguely named or animal by-products are the only proteins can't score higher than a 2

## Customer Experience (1-5)

- 1 - Almost exclusively negative qualities
- 2 - More negative than positive
- 3 - Mostly positive with several serious concerns
- 4 - Mostly positive with 1 serious or minimal concerns
- 5 - Almost exclusively positive

**Overview:** Based on a combination of star-ratings (from *non*-brand-affiliated retailers with more than 100 reviews) and recalls/customer complaints.

**Positive Influencing Factors:**

- Higher than a 4/5 star rating with a lot of customer reviews
- More than 100 reviews on more than one retail site
- Brand makes an effort to communicate about reformulations
- Product packaging is recyclable and resealable

- Brand uses transparent, accurate language on packaging (ex: no claims that can't be verified or heavy use of terms like "real" and "natural")

#### **Negative Influencing Factors:**

- Fewer than 100 customer reviews available outside of brand website
- Over 4/5 star customer rating but a significant number of recent reviews are negative
- History of customer complaints online or to FDA
- Significant number of concerning negative reviews (ex: pets getting sick or dying, even if no recall was issued)
- Recent or significant number of formulation changes without adequate communication by the brand
- Packaging is difficult to use

### **Recall History (1-5)**

1 - Company has been involved in mandatory recalls from the FDA

3 - Company has been involved in voluntary recalls

5 - Has never been recalled

**Overview:** Highest rated brands have a proven history of product quality and safety as well as proactive responsiveness to customer complaints.

#### **Positive Influencing Factors:**

- If any recalls, more were voluntary than FDA-issued
- Only 1 or 2 recalls but for minor issues like labeling error (ex: Nature's Variety voluntary recall because food had an "off" odor but wasn't contaminated)

#### **Negative Influencing Factors:**

- Brand is under 10 years old with no recalls (max score 4/5)
- Brand of any age has 3 or more recalls
- Most recalls are for major issues (ex: salmonella, foreign objects, dangerous levels of some nutrient)
- All recalls are FDA-issued
- No recalls but a history of consumer complaints (ex: Meow Mix crowd-funded study that revealed mycotoxin)

### **Product Variety (1-5)**

- **Limited Selection (1/5)** = Only one type of food and a very limited variety of flavors, and textures (ex: [Young Again](#))
- **Moderate Selection (3/5)** = Two types of food; some variety of flavors, and textures (ex: [Tiki Cat](#))

- **Wide Selection (5/5)** = Wide variety of food types (at least 3), flavors, and textures

**Overview:** The highest-rated brands will offer at least 3 different types of food (ex: dry, wet, freeze-dried, topper, treats) in at least 5 different flavors (ideally a mix of meat, poultry, and seafood).

**Positive Influencing Factors:**

- Brand offers at least 3 types of food products
- Brand offers food in at least 5 flavors
- Products include a mix of meat, poultry, and fish flavors
- Wet food products in a variety of textures
- Brand offers special formulations/product lines (ex: LID, indoor, or therapeutic)

**Negative Influencing Factors:**

- Only one type of food
- Fewer than 3 different flavors
- All flavors are too similar (ex: types of fish or types of poultry)

## Price (1-3)

**\*\*price is not included in the rating total**

**Overview:** Group similarly priced brands together rather than identifying each with subjective qualifiers like cheap or expensive.

**Description:**

- **Super Saver (3/3)** - These are drugstore and grocery store brands like Meow Mix, Friskies, etc. (maybe under \$0.15/oz. average)
- **Mid-Range (2/3)** - Most mid-tier cat foods (\$0.16/oz to \$0.35/oz.)
- **Splurge (1/3)** - Highest ranked brands (Over \$0.36/oz. average)

**Positive Influencing Factors:**

- Brand offers products at numerous price points (ex: [Merrick](#) Purrfect Bistro vs Backcountry)
- Majority of dry foods are priced under \$1 per pound
- Majority of wet foods are priced under \$0.15 per ounce
- Nothing more expensive than \$0.20 per ounce (dry or wet) (3/3)

**Negative Influencing Factors:**

- All products are in the same (high) price range (1/3)
- Brand only offers price-prohibitive food types (ex: [Raw Paws](#), only frozen and freeze-dried)
- Few or no foods priced under \$0.35 per ounce

## *Not Included in Rating/ Grade:*

**Meets AAFCO Guidelines? Yes/No**

Letter Grade	Percent Grade	4.0 Scale
A+	97-100	4.0
A	93-96	4.0
A-	90-92	3.7
B+	87-89	3.3
B	83-86	3.0
B-	80-82	2.7
C+	77-79	2.3
C	73-76	2.0
C-	70-72	1.7
D+	67-69	1.3
D	65-66	1.0
E/F	Below 65	0.0