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How to Read Dog Food Labels



We dog care givers are now somewhat protected against misleading dog food labels. That's because of the oversight, rules, regulations and requirements of AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials). But, unless we know what these rules are and how they are applied to the wording on labels they're of no use to us.

Some dog food manufacturers can be quite devious and will often use very clever nuances in the title and also in arrangement of words on the label that can be very different to what the dog food actually contains. Also, there is an important component to this, these rules relate just to solid material in the dog food and do not address the moisture levels.

It should be noted that pet food labeling is regulated on a federal and state-by-state basis, with only "limited" guidance from the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO).



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Please be aware of the fact that pet food producers often use terms that are undefined by the regulations to communicate more effectively with consumers and to enhance their product's image in the market. The AAFCO warns on their website that "it is not rare at all that labeling and marketing information is designed to appeal to the latest trend in marketing human products."

WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR WORDING?

*Chicken for Dogs: If chicken is the first word in this label, and is not combined with any other words like "dinner" or "flavor", etc.; in order to meet the AAFCO regulations, this product must actually contain at least 95% chicken.

*Turkey and Chicken Dog Food: By labeling it "Turkey and Chicken Dog Food", and nothing else, you can be relatively certain that this product is made up of 95% turkey and chicken combined, with the chicken content being slightly less than the turkey, since turkey is listed as the first ingredient.

*Chicken Nuggets for Dogs: By using the word "nuggets" (a qualifier that many dog food companies can legally use) and since this name has the word "nuggets" in its title, the chicken in the food is going to be less than 95% of the total ingredients, but must be at least 25%. Some of the other words manufacturers can use to get away with using less meat are "dinner", "formula", and "platter". A food having this name doesn't even have chicken in the top three ingredients!

*Chicken Flavor Dog Food: The word "flavor" is the key to this one. AAFCO rules require that there must only be enough "chicken" to add an actual flavor to the food. It could be chicken fat, or chicken broth, or chicken by-products, and it could be a very small amount.

*Dog Food with Chicken: A food listed as "with" anything is required to contain only 3% of that ingredient. Dog food "with" chicken, or "with" beef, must contain only 3% of chicken or beef.

Now you can see what a difference the order of words makes!

Your dog's health and longevity greatly depends on feeding him or her a safe and healthy diet. But figuring out how to read and interpret dog food labels can be perplexing. If you adhere to the following guidelines you should be able to read labels and understand them well enough to compare different products with confidence.



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* The labeling of all pet food is regulated on a federal and state-by-state basis, with guidance from the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). However, AAFCO provides only minimum requirements. So, be aware that dog food manufacturers often use terms that are not defined by AAFCO regulations so they can make their product more appealing and enhance their brand and or product's image to consumers. On their website the AAFCO cautions, "it is not rare at all that labeling and marketing information is designed to appeal to the latest trend in marketing human products."

DOG FOOD LABELS - GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

* The "Guaranteed Analysis" on the dog food label at the back of the bag is a chart that lists the percentages of various ingredients contained in that food (see an example below). The percentages listed for protein, fat, and fiber are measurements of the food in its current state. However, because different foods have varying amounts of moisture, you can only reasonably compare dog foods "on a dry matter basis". However, the numbers given in the Guaranteed Analysis are on an "as fed" basis and do not take into account the amount of moisture in that food. To determine the actual amount of an ingredient in a food, or to compare between brands or between wet and dry foods, the numbers need to be converted to what is called Dry Matter (DM) basis.

* Please note that the moisture content can range anywhere from as little as 6% for dry foods to as much as 80% for canned foods. and it's obvious that canned food contains more moisture than dry kibble. However, ironically, it may not contain as much protein. It's hard to know which food contains the most protein, fat or fiber before converting both to a dry matter basis.

* Here's how: First, (using the example below) determine the amount of dry matter by deducting the percentage listed for moisture from 100%. As you see, the moisture accounts for 10% of the food. So, we see that the dry matter content is (100% - 10% =) 90% of the food.

Contact Details:

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