

We frequently get questions about feeding and pet foods. There is a lot of research going on and many issues involved, making this one of the most complex pet care concerns.

Commercial Vs Homemade / table scrap diets:

The pet food industry developed out of the beef production industry in the late 1800s. The diets made use of parts not favored or usable for human consumption (Bruised, scar or other discolored or unfavorable appearing meat, lungs, guts, lumps and such). Initially there was little nutritional understanding or concern, but provided convenience. With the turn of the century, more veterinarians and animal nutritionists became involved in producing diet formulas and the quality began to improve. The earliest studies on dog and cat nutrition and formulation of nutritional needs dates to the 1920's and 30's.

Recent studies of home-made formulas vs commercial foods show more health problems - such as kidney & bladder stones, dental disease, heart disease and skin disease in the scrap and home-made diet populations.

Understanding Pet food labels;

In large

part, you get what you pay for in pet foods. Higher cost premium and super premium foods use highest quality ingredients and have extensive study and testing behind them. Lower cost foods use the cheapest available (and typically low quality) ingredients, may or may not have been formulated to meet nutritional needs or to evaluate bio-availability (digestibility) of the nutrients in either formulation or testing, and may lack good quality control. The label is a mix of marketing and useful information.

The best thing to look at is the AAFCO label stating how the food was tested (feeding trial or "formulated in accordance with") and the ingredient list. Listed Beef or chicken or meat is best quality, then by-product. Meal is boiled down masses and things that you wouldn't want to eat without cooking.

-Name: pet foods are named with marketing ideas appealing to the people who buy the foods. "Authority", "Science diet" "pedigree" and others appeal to a sense of expert knowledge. "Natural life", "Natura" and such make it sound 'natural' - assuming that natural is in some way better. Mercury, cyanide and lead are natural but not healthy or safe. Additionally there is no definition of what 'natural' is. There is a standard for how foods are raised that is Organic.

Foods come in several qualities:

¥ Super premium (Same ingredients all the time, high quality food items) - such as Science Diet, Royal Canin or Purina Proplan. These foods are always tested by feeding trial.

¥ Premium foods (Nutro, Pedigree, Iams, Purina ONE) which use a limited list of ingredients of good quality but maybe not human food level quality and do test the food.

¥ Standard: (Purina dog chow, Alpo, FitN Trim): Variable ingredients and may or may not test the foods to ensure nutritional completeness.

¥ Generic or Discount: (Eagle, many store brands): low quality ingredients and saturated with fat digest soup to make the food more palatable. They change the ingredients frequently based on cost (the law says they have 6 months to make the label reflect actual ingredients).

¥ Minor label & specialty foods: Some are very good and some are not. To make foods one just needs to follow cleanliness rules - no nutrition training is needed. Always look for the AAFCO label that says the food was tested for nutritional completeness.

Pet food ingredients, as all parts of the meat packing industry, fall under USDA and FDA regulation and inspection. The rules are spelled out in US government regulations, applied by USDA veterinarian meat inspectors and other USDA officials under the Food Safety and Inspection System. Details may be found at WWW.FSIS.USDA.GOV under a search of Pet foods. Or they are in Book 9 of CFR (Codified Federal Regulations), part 355. The rules are confusing for lay persons as there is a special terminology used, or the same word used for several

? different situations. The most common is "Condemned" which means the meat is not for human use, but has subcategories.

The meat processors separate meat and left overs into human level and nonhuman quality. Meat products approved for pet use are typically "Condemned" for human use, but edible -human quality meat products may be used. Food quality meat is unmarked or suffers minor cosmetic blemishes. If not human

quality due to imperfection, damage, scar, or from parts with tumors it may be used for pet food AFTER tumors or spots of infection are removed. Feed quality is things people wouldn't eat but are fine with dogs and cats - Old & emaciated animals, lungs, tendons, some internal organs, udder and guts (split and contents removed). These are decharacterized (marked), with charcoal or other non-toxic markers. Cereal by-products may include such things as wheat middlings, Brewery mash and beet pulp. It doesn't include rotten spoiled grains. The regulations specifically prohibit mold, smut or discolored grain.

Some things are not acceptable for use as feeds. Animals which arrive to the slaughterhouse dead already, abscesses, cancers, rotten bodies, injection site scars or implants. These are removed and treated with chemicals to denature them and make them unusable as food. When treated with fuel oil, kerosene, carbolic acid or lye (denaturing agents) they are only to be used for fertilizer and industrial purposes (soaps, plastic manufacture and other industrial grease from this). Euthanized pets, road kills, and styrofoam & plastic wrap from supermarket meat are not put into pet foods. They may end up in bone meal intended for garden and crop use only.

If not treated with denaturing agents, they must be immediately rendered. Rendering is by grinding and / or directly boiling to produce industrial grease and "tankage", bone and meat meal which may be fed to cattle and other livestock.

The definition of these products is also under the Federal regulations:

- Meat: Clean flesh from slaughtered animals; limited to tongue, diaphragm, skeletal muscle, heart or esophagus. If identified by species it must be from the animal type listed.
- Meat by-product: Nonrendered clean parts other than meat. It may include: lung, spleen, brain, liver, blood, bone and stomach or intestine freed of contents. It may not include horns, teeth or hooves. If identified by species it must be from the animal type listed.
- Meat Meal: Rendered dried and ground tissue without added blood, hair, hoof, horn, hide trimmings, manure or stomach contents. If not identified by species then it can be almost anything.