



WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee: Recommendations on Selecting Pet Foods

Factual information must be provided on pet food labels but it is important to be aware that the label is also a promotional tool to attract pet owners. This means that much of the information provided - including the ingredient list and use of unregulated terms such as 'holistic'; 'premium' or 'human grade' - is of little practical value in assisting nutritional assessment. The veterinary team plays a vital role in helping pet owners make informed decisions based on two key pieces of information:

A. The manufacturer's name and contact information. This allows a member of the veterinary team or the pet owner to contact the manufacturer to ask the following questions:

1. Do you employ a full time qualified nutritionist?
Appropriate qualifications are either a PhD in animal nutrition or board-certification by the American College of Veterinary Nutrition (ACVN) or the European College of Veterinary Comparative Nutrition (ECVCN). What is this nutritionist's name and qualifications?
2. Who formulates your foods and what are his/her credentials?
3. Are your diets tested using AAFCO feeding trials or by formulation to meet AAFCO nutrient profiles? If the latter, do they meet AAFCO nutrient profiles by formulation or by analysis of the finished product?
4. Where are your foods produced and manufactured?
5. What specific quality control measures do you use to assure the consistency and quality of your ingredients and the end product?
6. Will you provide a complete nutrient analysis for the dog or cat food in question? (Can they provide an average/typical analysis, not just the guaranteed analysis which is only the minimums or maximums and not an exact number)? You should be able to ask for any nutrient - e.g. protein, phosphorus, sodium, etc. - and get an exact number. This should ideally be given on an energy basis (i.e. grams per 100 kilocalories or grams per 1,000 kilocalories), rather than on an 'as fed' or 'dry matter' basis which don't account for the variable energy density of different foods.
7. What is the caloric value per gram, can, or cup of your foods?
8. What kind of product research has been conducted?
Are the results published in peer-reviewed journals?

If the manufacturer cannot or will not provide any of this information, owners should be cautious about feeding that brand.

B. In some countries, the AAFCO adequacy statement is included on the label. This statement confirms three important facts:

1. Whether the diet is complete and balanced. All over-the-counter foods should be complete and balanced. If the statement reads 'for intermittent or supplemental use only,' it is not complete and balanced. That may be acceptable if it is a veterinary therapeutic diet and is being used for a specific purpose - e.g. in a case of severe kidney disease - but should be avoided in over-the-counter pet foods.
2. If the food is complete and balanced, what life stage is it intended? AAFCO provides nutrient profiles and feeding trial requirements for growth, reproduction, and adult maintenance, but not for senior/geriatric pets. A food that is formulated to meet the AAFCO profiles for all life stages must meet the minimum nutrient levels for both growth and adult maintenance.
3. If the food is complete and balanced, how did the company determine this? Labels may include one of two statements regarding nutritional adequacy.
 - "[Name] is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Dog (or Cat) Food Nutrient Profiles for [life stage(s)]." (Analysis of food.)
 - "Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate [Name] provides complete and balanced nutrition for [life stage(s)]." (Feeding trial evaluation of food.)

Formulated foods are manufactured so the ingredients meet specified levels, either based on the recipe or on analytical testing of the finished product, without testing via feeding trials. While feeding trials help to test for the food's nutritional adequacy, the use of feeding trials does not guarantee that the food provides adequate nutrition under all conditions. It is important to ensure that the criteria in section A also help to ensure that the food is made by a reputable and knowledgeable company with strict quality control measures.

