



Selecting Pet Food

Selecting pet food is one of the most important decisions that you will make in your pet's life. The type of food will impact the health of your pet. When deciding what food to buy, there are a few guidelines that we recommend.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR PET FOOD

1) IS YOUR PET DOING WELL ON THE FOOD?

AT THE END OF THE DAY, THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION. UNLESS THERE IS KNOWLEDGE THAT A PARTICULAR BRAND IS KNOWN TO HAVE QUALITY CONTROL ISSUES OR A BAD BATCH, WE DO NOT RECOMMEND CHANGING BRANDS OF PET FOOD.

2) DOES THE BAG HAVE AN AAFCO STATEMENT ON THE BAG?

WHILE THE AAFCO STANDARDS ARE NOT PERFECT, IT IS CURRENTLY THE ONLY NATIONAL STANDARD FOR COMMERCIALY PREPARED PET FOOD. YOU CAN FIND MORE INFO AT www.petfood.aaeco.org. AAFCO HAS THREE STATEMENTS THEY WILL PUT ON A BAG.

- "ANIMAL FEEDING TRIALS" – THIS TELLS YOU THE FOOD WAS FED TO REAL DOGS OR CATS AND THAT THEY DID WELL ON IT FOR 6 MONTHS AS ADULT DOGS OR HAVE GROWN WELL AS PUPPIES. THIS IS AAFCO'S HIGHEST STANDARD AND IS CONSIDERED THE "GOLD STANDARD" THAT YOU WANT ON YOUR PET FOOD.

- "FORMULATED TO MEET" – THIS SAYS THAT THE FORMULATION ANALYSIS OF THE FOOD MEETS THE AAFCO GUIDELINES, BUT THE FOOD DID NOT PASS OR WAS NOT PUT THROUGH FEEDING TRIALS TO REAL PETS.

- "MEANT FOR INTERMITTENT OR SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING" – THIS TELLS YOU THAT THE DIET IS NOT COMPLETE AND BALANCED. THIS SHOULD NEVER BE FED AS A SOLE DIET TO A DOG OR CAT.

3) WHO OWNS THE PET FOOD PLANT?

THERE ARE ONLY FOUR OR FIVE COMPANIES THAT OWN THEIR OWN PET FOOD PLANTS. THE COMPANIES THAT DO NOT OWN THEIR PLANTS ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF PRINTING BAGS AND BIDDING OUT WHO WILL MAKE THEIR FORMULATION. WE ONLY RECOMMEND PET FOODS THAT ARE MADE IN PLANTS OWNED BY THE MANUFACTURER. WE HAVE GREATER

CONFIDENCE IN THEIR SOURCING OF INGREDIENTS AND THEIR CONTROLS OVER THE QUALITY OF THE FOOD.

4) WHAT KIND OF QUALITY ASSURANCE TESTING IS DONE ON THE FOOD?

WE ONLY RECOMMEND BRANDS THAT MEET THE MOST RIGOROUS QUALITY STANDARDS. THE COMPANIES WE ARE IMPRESSED WITH OPERATE THEIR OWN ON-SITE, IN-HOUSE LABS. IN THE BEST PLANTS, SAMPLES ARE TAKEN BEFORE THE INGREDIENTS ARE EVEN RECEIVED, CHECKING FOR TOXINS AND CONTAMINANTS THUS KEEPING THE FOOD SAFE FOR YOUR PET. IN-LINE TESTING MAKES SURE THAT THE FOOD IS MEETING FORMULATION STANDARDS AT EVERY STEP OF THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS. AFTER THE FOOD IS MADE AND PACKAGED, STORAGE TESTING ENSURES THAT THE PRODUCT MEETS ALL OF YOUR DOG OR CATS REQUIREMENTS THE DAY YOU BUY IT AS IT DID WHEN IT WAS MADE.

5) WHAT IS BELOW SALT ON THE INGREDIENT LIST?

IN PET FOOD, INGREDIENTS ARE LISTED IN ORDER OF WEIGHT. SALT (NaCl OR SODIUM CHLORIDE) IS TYPICALLY 1% OF A PET FOOD DIET. ANYTHING LOWER THAN SALT ON THE INGREDIENT LIST MAKES UP LESS THAN 1% OF DIET. IF YOU SEE THINGS THAT YOU RECOGNIZE LIKE BLUEBERRIES, CARROTS, ACACIA ROOT ETC, ASK IF THERE IS A NUTRITIONAL BENEFIT OF BLUEBERRIES AT LESS THAN 1% OF DIET? IF NOT, WHY IS THAT COMPANY PUTTING SUCH A SMALL AMOUNT IN BUT MAKING BIG CLAIMS ABOUT IT ON THE FRONT OF THE BAG. ASK YOURSELF, WHAT ARE THE ETHICS OF THAT COMPANY? WHICH DO THEY VALUE MORE HIGHLY: MARKETING OR SCIENCE?

6) DOES THE FOOD CLAIM “NATURAL, HUMAN-GRADE OR HOLISTIC”?

THESE THREE TERMS ARE MARKETING TERMS THAT HAVE NO DEFINITION IN PET FOOD. NO PET FOOD CAN BE 100% NATURAL. THIAMINE, FOR EXAMPLE, IS AN IMPORTANT SUPPLEMENT - AS IT IS HARD TO MEET AAFCO'S REQUIREMENTS FROM NATURAL SOURCES. THE THIAMINE SUPPLY IS A SYNTHESIZED VITAMIN JUST LIKE THAT FOUND IN HUMAN MULTIVITAMINS. THE TERM HUMAN-GRADE IS NOT AN ACCEPTED, OR DEFINED, OR LEGAL TERM ON PET FOOD LABELS. HOLISTIC IS A TERM THAT HAS A LOT OF INFERRED MEANINGS BUT ALSO IS NOT DEFINED. IF THE TERMS ARE UNDEFINED, A STATEMENT USING THESE TERMS BY ONE COMPANY CAN MEAN SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT THAN ANOTHER COMPANY. WHAT ARE PET FOODS COMPANIES CLAIMING AND WHAT ARE THEY REALLY TELLING YOU WHEN THEY USE THESE LABELS? WE THINK IT SAYS THAT THEY PUT MARKETING AHEAD OF SCIENCE AND NUTRITION.

7) DOES THE PET FOOD COMPANY SPONSOR BASIC NUTRITIONAL RESEARCH AT U.S. VETERINARY COLLEGES?

THE KNOWLEDGE BASE OF PET NUTRITION IS ALWAYS GROWING AND CHANGING. THE BEST COMPANIES ARE DRIVING THAT KNOWLEDGE FORWARD BY SPONSORING INDEPENDENT RESEARCHERS TO ASK

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT CURING DISEASES THAT CAN AFFECT YOUR PET THROUGH NUTRITION. THESE STUDIES ALSO HELP EDUCATE FUTURE VETERINARIANS.

8) DOES THE PET FOOD COMPANY HAVE A BOARD CERTIFIED VETERINARY NUTRITIONIST ON STAFF?

THERE ARE ONLY ABOUT 85 VETERINARIANS IN THE UNITED STATES WHO HAVE GONE ON TO FURTHER STUDY TO BECOME BOARD CERTIFIED IN VETERINARY NUTRITION. THESE ARE THE THOUGHT LEADERS IN THIS INDUSTRY. HAVING ONE OR MORE OF THESE UNIQUELY QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS ON STAFF IN YOUR COMPANY IS A MEASURE OF COMMITMENT TOWARD NUTRITIONAL QUALITY AND RELEVANCE. BOTH REGULATIONS SPECIALISTS AND VETERINARY NUTRITIONISTS HELP TO KEEP THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT AT BAY.

9) DOES THE COMPANY MAINTAIN A WELL RUN KENNEL AND CATTERY?

THERE IS INCREASED AND APPROPRIATE CONCERN OVER THE PLIGHT OF RESEARCH ANIMALS. THIS HAS CAUSED CONCERN OVER THE CONDITIONS OF KENNELS AND CATTERIES RUN BY PET FOOD COMPANIES. THE DOGS AND CATS AT THE KENNEL FACILITIES OF THE PET FOOD COMPANIES WE RECOMMEND ARE WELL CARED FOR. THE CATS AND DOGS THERE ARE WELL LOVED, CARED FOR, AND SOCIALIZED. THESE COMPANIES DO NOT CONDUCT ANY ANIMAL STUDIES THAT INVOLVE ANYTHING MORE THAN TAKING A BLOOD SAMPLE. THE BEST COMPANIES MAINTAIN A KENNEL AND CATTERY OF HAPPY, WELL SOCIALIZED PETS THAT HELP INSURE COMPLETE NUTRITION FOR YOUR PET IN ALL LIFE STAGES AND PALATABILITY OF THEIR FOOD.

10) DOES THE COMPANY HAVE AN “800” NUMBER ON THE BAG?

IF THEY DO, CALL IT AND GET THEIR ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS. IF THEY DON'T, WHY DON'T THEY? FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT ACVN.ORG, BALANCEIT.COM, PETDIETS.COM AND OF COURSE AT OUR ANIMAL HOSPITAL

THIS ARTICLE WRITTEN BY: DR. REED STEVENS, ELLICOTT ANIMAL HOSPITAL, BUFFALO, NY AND JEFF DOODY, NESTLE PURINA PET CARE.