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Consumer Care: 1.800.452.0605

Understanding Labels

Five sections of a dog food label reveal what is in the food you're buying. Here's what you need to know to understand the information on a dog food label.

The name of the food

The name can tell you how much of an ingredient is in the food. Dog food names that have the animal protein source in the title, such as beef formula, indicate that at least 25 percent of the diet is indeed the named ingredient. Names that contain the word with (such as with chunky chicken) or flavor (such as turkey flavor) can contain as little as 3 percent of that ingredient.

The ingredient panel

This section on the label lists all the ingredients that make up the product. The ingredients must be listed in descending order according to weight before cooking. The first ingredient in dry food should be a source of high-quality animal-based protein—chicken or lamb for example. Dogs thrive on animal proteins, but may not do as well on vegetable proteins such as soybean meal. Manufacturers who use large amounts of vegetable proteins may be saving money at the expense of a dog's overall well-being. Other ingredients to avoid are artificial colors and flavors, which offer no nutritional benefits.

The guaranteed analysis

Near the ingredient panel should be a chart of percentages called the "guaranteed analysis." These figures reveal the basic nutrient make-up of the dog food's formula, including protein content. The minimum percentages of protein and fat and the maximum percentages of fiber and moisture (water) should be listed.

Nutritional adequacy statement

If the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement says "animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures," the food was actually fed to dogs at that same life stage and found to be adequate. If the AAFCO statement refers to "meeting nutrient profiles," the dog food may not have been tested with dogs. Instead, the food was analyzed in a laboratory and the results were compared to recognized industry standards.

The manufacturer's name and address

This information must be on the label by law. A toll-free number may also be listed. Manufacturers, such as The Iams Company, who list a phone number, generally have a high-quality product and welcome consumer calls and questions.

Beware of products that read packed for or distributed by. These foods aren't made by the store whose name may be on the front label, but are from a manufacturer whose quality and consistency controls may not be monitored
