

In the United States there are several agencies and organizations that regulate the production and quality of pet foods to take the guess work out of canine nutrition. The most influential and important of these agencies is the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO).

Reading the pet food label:

Ingredient List: Legally ingredients must be listed in descending order of weight, however companies can separate different forms of the same ingredient so they appear further down the list. For example Corn, Corn Bran and Corn Meal could all be listed separately and it would appear that corn is not a primary ingredient. It's important to read the entire list of ingredients.

Some veterinarians believe that synthetic antioxidants like ethoxyquin and synthetic preservatives like, BHA and BHT can cause seizures in dogs. Look for dog foods that are preserved with natural antioxidants such as Vitamin E (tocopherol and Vitamin C (ascorbic acid)).

The AAFCO Statement:

The AAFCO Statement contains three important pieces of information. First it states whether the food is complete and balanced. The term "complete" means that the dog food contains all of the required nutrients for canine good health. Balanced means that those nutrients are present in the proper amounts according to the AAFCO.

Second states what stage of a dogs life the food is formulated for; adult, growth or reproduction.

Third is the method used to substantiate the first two claims. AAFCO only recognizes two methods of testing, analysis using laboratory or computer based models and analysis using feeding protocols.

The following is a list of commonly used pet food ingredients and their definitions according to the AAFCO:

Animal Digest – material which results from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and un-decomposed animal tissue. The animal tissues used shall be exclusive of hair, horns, teeth, hooves and feathers, except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice and shall be suitable for animal feed.

Animal Fat – is obtained from the tissues of mammals and/or poultry in the commercial processes of rendering or extracting. It consists predominantly of glyceride esters of fatty acids and contains no additions of free fatty acids. If an antioxidant is used, the common name or names must be indicated, followed by the words "used as a preservative".

Barley – consists of at least 80 percent sound barley and must not contain more than 3 percent heat-damaged kernels, 6 percent foreign material, 20 percent other grains or 10 percent wild oats.

Barley Flour – soft, finely ground and bolted barley meal obtained from the milling of barley. It consists essentially of the starch and gluten of the endosperm.

Beef (meat) – is the clean flesh derived from slaughtered cattle, and is limited to that part of the striate muscle which is skeletal or that which is found in the tongue, in the diaphragm, in the heart, or in the esophagus; with or without the accompanying and overlying fat and the portions of the skin, sinew, nerve and blood vessels which normally accompany the flesh.

Beet Pulp ("beet pulp, dried molasses" and "beet pulp, dried, plain") – the dried residue from sugar beets.

Chicken – the clean combination of flesh and skin with or without accompanying bone, derived from the parts or whole carcasses of chicken or a combination thereof, exclusive of feathers, heads, feet and entrails.

Chicken By-Product Meal – consists of the ground, rendered, clean parts of the carcass of slaughtered chicken, such as necks, feet, undeveloped eggs and intestines, exclusive of feathers, except in such amounts as might occur unavoidable in good processing practice.

Chicken Liver Meal – chicken livers which have been ground or otherwise reduced in particle size.

Chicken Meal – chicken which has been ground or otherwise reduced in particle size.

Corn Bran – the outer coating of the corn kernel, with little or none of the starchy part of the germ.

Corn Germ Meal (Dry Milled) – ground corn germ which consists of corn germ with other parts of the corn kernel from which part of the oil has been removed and is the product obtained in the dry milling process of manufacture of corn meal, corn grits, hominy feed and other corn products.

Corn Gluten – that part of the commercial shelled corn that remains after the extraction of the larger portion of the starch, gluten, and term by the processes employed in the wet milling manufacture of corn starch or syrup.

Corn Gluten Meal – the dried residue from corn after the removal of the larger part of the starch and germ, and the separation of the bran by the process employed in the wet milling manufacture of corn starch or syrup, or by enzymatic treatment of the endosperm.

Cracked Pearl Barley – cracked pearl barley resulting from the manufacture of pearl barley from clean barley.

Digest of Beef – material from beef which results from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and un-decomposed tissue. The tissues used shall be exclusive of hair, horns, teeth and hooves, except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice.

Digest of Beef By-Products – material from beef which results from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and un-decomposed tissue from non-rendered clean parts, other than meat, from cattle which includes, but is not limited to, lungs, spleen, kidneys, brain, livers, blood, bone, partially de-fatted low-temperature fatty tissue, and stomachs and intestines freed of their contents. It does not include hair, horns, teeth and hoofs.

Digest of Poultry By-Products – material which results from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and un-decomposed tissue from non-rendered clean parts of carcasses of slaughtered poultry such as heads, feet, viscera, free from fecal content and foreign matter except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice.

Dried Animal Digest – dried material resulting from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and un-decomposed animal tissue. The animal tissue used shall be exclusive of hair, horns, teeth, hooves and feathers, except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice and shall be suitable for animal feed. If it bears a name descriptive of its kind or flavor(s), it must correspond thereto.

Dried Whey – the product obtained by removing water from the whey. It contains not less than 11 percent protein nor less than 61 percent lactose.

Feeding Oatmeal – obtained in the manufacture of rolled oat groats or rolled oats and consists of broken oat groats, oat groat chips, and floury portions of the oat groats, with only such quantity of finely ground oat hulls as is unavoidable in the usual process of commercial milling. It must not contain more than 4 percent crude fiber.

Fish Meal – the clean, dried, ground tissue of un-decomposed whole fish or fish cuttings, either or both, with or without the extraction of part of the oil.

Ground Corn (ground ear corn) – the entire ear of corn ground, without husks, with no greater portion of cob than occurs in the ear corn in its natural state.

Ground Whole Brown Rice (Ground Brown Rice) – the entire product obtained by grinding the rice kernels after the hulls have been removed.

Ground Yellow Corn – same as ground corn, except that the corn used is yellow in color.

Kibbled Corn – obtained by cooking cracked corn under steam pressure and extruding from an expeller or other mechanical pressure device.

Lamb Bone Meal – (steamed) dried and ground product sterilized by cooking un-decomposed bones with steam under pressure. Grease, gelatin and meat fiber may or may not be removed.

Lamb Digest – material resulting from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and un-decomposed lamb. The tissue used shall be exclusive of hair, horns, teeth and hooves, except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice and shall be suitable for animal feed.

Lamb Fat – obtained from the tissues of lamb in the commercial processes of rendering or extracting. It consists predominantly of glyceride esters of fatty acids and contains no additions of free fatty acids. If an antioxidant is used, the common name or names must be indicated, followed by the words "used as a preservative".

Lamb Meal – the rendered product from lamb tissues, exclusive of blood, hair, hoof, horn, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents except in such amounts as may occur unavoidably in good processing practices.

Linseed Meal – the product obtained by grinding the cake or chips which remain after removal of most of the oil from flaxseed by a mechanical extraction process. It must contain no more than 10 percent fiber. The words "mechanical extracted" are not required when listing as an ingredient in the manufactured food.

Liver – the hepatic gland (of whatever species is listed).

Meat and Bone Meal – the rendered product from mammal tissues, including bone, exclusive of blood, hair, hoof, horn, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents, except in such amounts as may occur unavoidably in good processing practices.

Meat By-Products – the non rendered, clean parts, other than meat, derived from slaughtered mammals. It includes, but is not limited to, lungs, spleen, kidneys, brain, livers, blood, bone, partially defatted low-temperature fatty tissue and stomachs and intestines freed of their contents. It does not include hair, horns, teeth and hooves.

Meat Meal – the rendered product from mammal tissues, exclusive of blood, hair, hoof, horn, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents except in such amounts as may occur unavoidably in good processing practices.

Poultry By-Product Meal – consists of the ground, rendered, clean parts of the carcass of slaughtered poultry, such as necks, feet, undeveloped eggs, intestines, exclusive of feathers, except in such amounts as might occur unavoidably in good processing practices.

Poultry Digest – material which results from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and un-decomposed poultry tissue.

Poultry Fat (feed grade) – primarily obtained from the tissue of poultry in the commercial process of rendering or extracting. It shall contain only the fatty matter natural to the product produced under good manufacturing practices and shall contain no added free fatty acids or other materials obtained from fat. It must contain not less than 90 percent total fatty acids and not more than 3 percent of unsaponifiables and impurities. It shall have a minimum titer of 33 degrees Celsius. If an antioxidant is used, the common name or names must be indicated, followed by the word "preservative".

Rice Bran – the pericarp or bran layer and germ of the rice, with only such quantity of hull fragments, chipped, broken, or brewer's rice, and calcium carbonate as is unavoidable in the regular milling of edible rice.

Soybean Hulls – consist primarily of the outer covering of the soybean.

Soybean Meal (De-hulled, solvent Extracted) – obtained by grinding the flakes remaining after removal of most of the oil from de-hulled soybeans by a solvent extraction process.

Soybean Meal (Mechanical Extracted) – obtained by grinding the cake or chips which remain after removal of most of the oil from the soybeans by a mechanical extraction process.

Soybean Mill Run – composed of soybean hulls and such bean meats that adhere to the hulls and such bean meats that adhere to the hulls which results from normal milling operations in the production of de-hulled soybean meal.

Turkey Meal – the ground clean combination of flesh and skin with or without accompanying bone, derived from the parts or whole carcasses of turkey or a combination thereof, exclusive of feathers, heads, feet and entrails.

Wheat Bran – the coarse outer covering of the wheat kernel as separated from cleaned and scoured wheat in the usual process of commercial milling.

Wheat Flour – wheat flour together with fine particles of wheat bran, wheat germ and the offal from the "tail of the mill". This product must be obtained in the usual process of commercial milling and must not contain more than 1.5 percent crude fiber.

Wheat Germ Meal – consists chiefly of wheat germ together with some bran and middlings or short. It must contain not less than 25 percent crude protein and 7 percent crude fat.

Wheat Mill Run – coarse wheat bran, fine particles of wheat bran, wheat shorts, wheat germ, wheat flour and the offal from the "tail of the mill". This product must be obtained in the usual process of commercial milling and must contain not more than 9.5 percent crude fiber.

Whey – the product obtained as a fluid by separating the coagulum from milk, cream or skimmed milk and from which a portion of the milk fat may have been removed.