

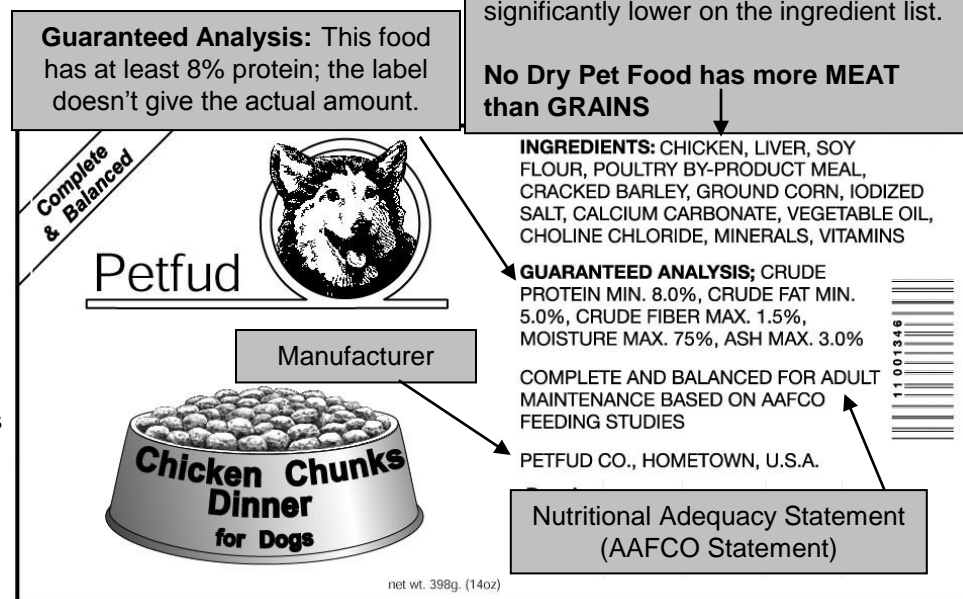


Pet Food Labels: What They Say— And What They Don't

The Pet Food Label: Key Information

- **Ingredients**, the delivery vehicles for nutrients, are listed in descending order by weight.
 - ✓ Ingredients such as chicken, beef, or lamb contain more than 50% water. The high water content makes them weigh more than dry ingredients (grains, meat/poultry meals, minerals, vitamins), so they are listed first.
 - ✓ Manufacturers should be willing to discuss nutrient levels and benefits, not just ingredients.
- Consumers want nutrient information about the pet foods they purchase. **The guaranteed analysis** gives minimum or maximum levels of nutrients such as protein, fat, and fiber in the product, as guidance to protect consumers. However, the guaranteed analysis **does not** give the actual nutrient content of the food.
- The **nutritional adequacy statement** verifies that the food provides complete and balanced nutrition for growing animals, pregnant and nursing mothers, or adults—or it might say the product is for all of them (“all life stages”).
 - ✓ Beware of foods intended for “all life stages”. They may contain excessive levels of some nutrients—making them inappropriate for adult and senior pets!
- A pet food label should contain the **manufacturer's name and toll-free 800 number**. Call the 800 number for product information not on the label—such as the actual nutrient content of the food and its caloric content.

A Closer Look At The Label



- The quality of a pet food is **NOT** determined by individual ingredients. It's the nutritional value of each ingredient, blended together, that delivers a product specific for a pet's age or condition. The guaranteed analysis is not a guarantee of nutritional quality—nor is the ingredient list or the presence/absence of certain ingredients.



Common Terms?

Pet food manufacturers commonly use terms to describe their foods, some of which are defined by guidelines or statutes and others which are purely marketing terminology without any definition under the law.

Term	Defined	Definition
Organic	Yes	According to the USDA – the term “Organic” may only be applied to pet food labels that follow USDA rules. Look for this seal
Natural	Yes	Under AAFCO guidelines– the term “natural” requires a pet food to consist of only natural ingredients without chemical alterations. ¹
Holistic	NO	There is no definition of this term under laws devoted to pet foods. Any manufacturer can make claims of “holistic” in literature and brochures regardless of ingredients chosen.
Human Grade	Yes	According to AAFO- claims that a pet food contains or is made from ingredients that are “human grade”, “human quality”, “people foods”, “ingredients you (the purchaser) would eat”, are false and misleading.... ²

¹ 2014 Official Publication AAFCO pages 148- 149, 319 (Official Feed Terms). ² – see reverse page



- **Does *natural* mean *organic*?**
- No. *Natural* and *organic* are not interchangeable. Food labeled "organic" must be certified as meeting USDA organic standards.¹
- Under existing regulations four categories were created for the term “organic”:
 - 100 Percent Organic - may carry the USDA Organic Seal
 - Organic - at least 95% of content is organic by weight (excluding water and salt) and may carry the USDA Organic Seal.
 - Made With Organic - at least 70% of content is organic and the front product panel may display the phrase "Made with Organic" followed by up to three specific ingredients. (May *not* display the USDA Organic seal)
 - Less than 70 % of content is organic and may list only those ingredients that are organic on the ingredient panel with no mention of organic on the main panel. (May *not* display the USDA Organic seal)

The first two categories are entitled to use the USDA Seal on the packaging under specific rules as to size, color and type. The last 2 categories may not use the seal.

²Association of American Feed Control Officials (March 2004) Section IV – Pet Food Label Claims – Page 66 Section E.

Claims that a product contains or is made from ingredients that are “human grade”, “human quality”, “people foods”, “ingredients you (the purchaser) would eat” “food(s) that you (the purchaser) would feed your family” or similar claims are false and misleading unless the entire product, itself, meets the USDA and FDA standards for food **edible** by humans. At this time, the use of “human grade” or “human quality” is not allowed, because these items are not defined.



What Does AAFCO's "All Life Stages" Mean?

- If the AAFCO statement says "complete and balanced for all life stages"...
 - ✓ The pet food has to be suitable for puppies, kittens or pregnant/lactating adults – which means some of the nutrients may be at levels that are excessive for typical adult and older pets!
- Pets need food that's appropriate for their specific stage in life so they will receive adequate, but not excessive, amounts of important nutrients.
 - ✓ Puppies, kittens and lactating mothers need more protein, vitamins, and minerals than adults to ensure proper growth.
 - ✓ For typical adult dogs & cats, excess intake of certain nutrients may make some conditions worse. For example, excessive phosphorus intake worsens kidney disease, a condition that often goes undetected in its early stages.
 - ✓ AAFCO does not publish nutrient guidelines for older dogs and cats. However, foods for these pets should address changes in vital organ function that occur as animals mature.
- The AAFCO statement on pet food packaging verifies the product is nutritionally balanced for a designated life stage:
 - ✓ Growth, pregnancy/lactation, adult, or **all life stages**
- Many pet food manufacturers offer products for a pet's specific stage in life (e.g., adults).
 - ✓ Check AAFCO statements to make sure the food you are feeding your puppy or kitten is appropriate for growth. **And make sure the dog or cat food you choose for your adult pet is intended for adult maintenance, NOT all life stages.**
- Recommend Hill's® Science Diet® brand pet foods with confidence. You can be sure that Science Diet dog and cat foods **offer precise nutrition for particular life stages.**



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