

PET PATTERN

THE LANGUAGE OF PET FOOD LABELS

by: Dr. Mark Kinghorn



Welcome back to the second in our series of articles on pet health and nutrition! This time we'll look at how to read and interpret pet food labels, a process which can at times be confusing.

I often see claims that "real meat" must be first on the ingredient list – the implication being that if it's not, the diet is inferior. Ingredients by law are listed in order of descending weight. While it may sound impressive that whole chicken is listed first, 70%

whole chicken is water weight. After processing this water evaporates to create chicken meal, which has the same nutritional value as whole chicken – just in a different form. Chicken meal as an ingredient is listed further down simply because it weighs less, not because it provides less nutrition.

Some ingredients are also "hidden." For example, corn starch, zea mays, corn bran, and corn gluten are all forms of corn. If listed together they weigh more and appear higher on the list, an unattractive feature for some consumers (although corn is actually a nutritious ingredient – see next month's article). Listed separately though, they appear lower and are less noticeable. Also, if a "grain free" diet is important for your pet, make sure it doesn't contain zea mays, another name for corn. You may be feeding grain after all!

Lastly, have you ever worried about the "by-products" that are listed? Well don't! By-products are simply products that are produced during the manufacturing of something else, not ingredients of lesser quality. What do vitamin E, flax seed oil, soy oil, beet pulp and tomato pomace all have in common? They're all by-products and all are used in the production of nutritious diets!

Let's now take a look at the guaranteed analysis. This list of minimum and maximum nutrient levels is not an indicator of the diet's quality. As an example, take the following guaranteed analysis: crude protein 10% min, crude fat 6.5% min, fibre 2.4% max, ash 4.3% max, moisture 68% max. What was used to obtain this analysis? 4 pairs of work boots, 1 gallon of used motor oil, 1 pail of charcoal, and 68 pounds of water!

The take home message is that pet foods can be difficult to evaluate based on labels alone. Purchase pet food from a company you trust, and who you know has invested time and effort into researching the diets they sell. Many diets on the market have never even been fed to a single animal before being sold!

Join us next month when we'll examine more marketing messages and trends in the pet food industry to make sure that you are an informed consumer.

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