

# Read any Good Pet Food Labels Lately?

Reprinted from *Professional Pet Sitter* · Fall 2012 by Marcia Breithaupt

[www.petsitters.org](http://www.petsitters.org)

As more and more pet parents like yourself consider feeding their dogs and cats a healthy diet, learning about the ingredients in your pet's food becomes even more important. While many leading dog and cat food brands cover the front of their bags with beautiful photography or illustrations of healthy ingredients, the ingredient listing on the back is where you can determine whether your pet's food is of the highest quality. Why is the first ingredient the most important? How do some brands categorize certain ingredients to make their food appear healthier? Why is corn not the healthiest ingredient? Take a minute to find out the answers to these questions and more.

## How to compare dog and cat food

When evaluating pet food ingredient listings consider the following factors. The first ingredient by weight is the most important because there is more of that ingredient than any other. All dog foods and cat foods must list the ingredients of their food in order of weight. When you compare the labels below, you see the first ingredient is real deboned chicken, fish, or lamb. In contrast, the first ingredient in a leading brand pet food is ground yellow corn. Corn has very little nutritional value, and has been linked to allergies in some dogs.

The top ten ingredients usually comprise 80% or more of a dry pet food's entire formula and give you a real insight into the formula's overall quality. For example, if you compare the top ten ingredients in the Chicken and Brown Rice Recipe (below) dog food to some of the leading dog food brands, the differences in ingredient quality are clear.

Some dog food and cat food brands define their ingredients in several different ways so that the ones of lower quality appear further down the ingredient list. For example, a product list could contain chicken, ground corn, corn gluten, ground wheat and corn bran. And, if you were to group all of the corn ingredients as one, they might far out-weigh the amount of chicken in that food, and be the first listed ingredient. Also be sure to read all of the ingredients at the end of the listing to know if any artificial preservatives and colorings are being used.

Now that you have a basic understanding of how to read a label, it's important to know the specific ingredients that comprise healthy dog and cat foods—as well as the ingredients that should give you pause:

- Real meat, such as chicken, fish or lamb, is a source of high-quality, highly digestible protein. Proteins are essential for growth, maintenance, reproduction, repair and energy.
- Whole grains such as brown rice, barley and oats supply complex carbohydrates to maintain your dog's or cat's energy level, and healthy fiber not found in most processed grains.
- Vegetables and fruit provide essential phytonutrients, antioxidants and enzymes, plus natural vitamins, minerals and fibers that promote and maintain health and wellness.

Many leading dog and cat foods contain the ingredients below, which are not of the highest quality:

- Poultry [Chicken] By-Product Meal
- Artificial color and chemical preservatives like BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin, and propylene glycol. They provide no nutritional value and have been associated with possible side effects, e.g. cancer.
- Corn, wheat and soy have been linked to allergic reactions in some dogs.

## The bottom line on pet food label comparison

Choosing the best dog or cat food for your beloved dog or cat isn't easy, especially when there are so many brands touting themselves as being healthy. Next time you're in the store, take a minute to review the dog or cat food you're using now. With what you've learned about pet food labels, that minute could mean a big difference in the health of your pet, not to mention to cost of your veterinarian bills.

*Marcia Breithaupt owns Liberty Home And Pet Services in Naples, Florida and serves on the NAPPS Board of Directors. You can contact her at [www.lhaps.com](http://www.lhaps.com).*

## A comparison of ingredients you'll find in pet foods.

### Chicken and Brown Rice Recipe (high quality ingredients):

**Ingredients**  
Deboned Chicken, Chicken Meal, Whole Ground Brown Rice, Whole Ground Barley, Oatmeal, Rye, Whole Potatoes, Tomato Pomace (natural source of Lycopene), Chicken Fat (preserved with Natural Mixed Tocopherols), Natural Chicken Flavor, Whole Carrots, Whole Sweet Potatoes, Blueberries, Cranberries, Flaxseed, Barley Grass, Dried Parsley, Alfalfa Meal, Kelp Meal, Taurine, L-Carnitine, L-Lysine, Glucosamine Hydrochloride, Yucca Schidigera Extract, Green Tea Extract, Turmeric, Garlic, Sunflower Oil (natural source of Omega 6 Fatty Acids), Herring Oil (natural source of Omega 3 Fatty Acids), Fructooligosaccharides, Monoooligosaccharides, Dried Chicory Root, Black Malted Barley, Oil of Rosemary, Vitamin A Supplement, Vitamin C, Vitamin E Supplement, Vitamin D3 Supplement, Beta Carotene, Calcium Ascorbate (source of Vitamin C), Vitamin B12 Supplement, Niacin (Vitamin B3), Calcium Pantothenate (Vitamin B5), Riboflavin (Vitamin B2), Pyridoxine Hydrochloride (Vitamin B6), Thiamine Hydrochloride (Vitamin B1), Folic Acid, Biotin, Choline Chloride, Calcium Phosphate, Zinc Amino Acid Complex (source of Chelated Zinc), Iron Amino Acid Complex (source of Chelated Iron), Copper Amino Acid Complex (source of Chelated Copper), Manganese Amino Acid Complex (source of Chelated Manganese), Potassium Amino Acid Complex (source of Chelated Potassium), Cobalt Proteinase (source of Chelated Cobalt), Potassium Chloride, Sodium Selenite, Salt, Lactobacillus acidophilus, Bacillus subtilis, Bifidobacterium thermophilum, Bifidobacterium longum, Enterococcus faecium.

### A Leading Brand (low quality food):

**INGREDIENTS:** Ground yellow corn, chicken by-product meal, corn gluten meal, whole wheat flour, animal fat preserved with mixed-tocopherols (form of Vitamin E), rice flour, beef, soy flour, sugar, propylene glycol, meat and bone meal, tricalcium phosphate, phosphoric acid, salt, water, animal digest, sorbic acid (a preservative), potassium chloride, dried carrots, dried peas, calcium propionate (a preservative), L-Lysine monohydrochloride, choline chloride, added color (Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Blue 2), DL-Methionine, Vitamin E supplement, zinc sulfate, ferrous sulfate, manganese sulfate, niacin, Vitamin A supplement, calcium carbonate, copper sulfate, Vitamin B-12 supplement, calcium pantothenate, thiamine mononitrate, garlic oil, pyridoxine hydrochloride, riboflavin supplement, Vitamin D-3 supplement, menadione sodium bisulfite complex (source of Vitamin K activity), calcium iodate, folic acid, biotin, sodium selenite. I-4090

### Notes about "meal" and "by-products," (from Pet 'N Play)

Contrary to what many people believe, meat sources in "**meal**" form (as long as they are from a specified type of animal, such as **chicken meal, lamb meal, salmon meal**, etc.) are not inferior to whole, fresh meats. Meals consist of meat and skin, with or without the bones, but exclusive of feathers/hair, heads, feet, horns, entrails etc. and have the proper calcium/phosphorus ratio required for a balanced diet. Chicken meal (for instance) is mainly used in pet foods and its protein content is much higher than regular chicken because most of the water has been removed.

**Animal by-products** (such as chicken by-product meal) are what are left of a slaughtered animal after the edible parts have been removed. They include the waste of meat processing **not intended for human consumption**. This includes EVERYTHING else, such as feathers/hair, heads, feet, horns, entrails etc., and offer little or NO nutritional value! Unspecified "meal", such as meat meal, also has little nutritional value.