

DO YOU REALLY KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR PET FOOD?

By Val Clows

Most people assume that because a pet food is labeled "100% complete and balanced" that it is a nutritious and healthy food. A common misconception. What is in many commercial pet foods is everything from road-kill to euthanized cats and dogs. The A.A.F.C.O. (Association of American Feed Control Officials) does not restrict what type of animals can be used in animal feeds.

Animal protein sources can consist of dead, diseased, dying and disabled animals contaminated with hormones and the drugs used to treat or kill them. Animal by-products can include hooves, horns, hair, feet, and feathers. Even fecal matter is legally labeled as animal by-product. Grains and vegetables commonly used are corn, wheat and soybean meal. These happen to be the three most common foods that dogs are allergic to. Preservatives, artificial colorings and flavorings accumulate in body tissue and have also been linked to long-term physiological disorders. Does this sound nutritious and healthy to you? Is it surprising that the average pet lifespan has decreased by 18% since 1950? Did you know that the commercial pet food industry began as a way to dispose of foods unfit for human consumption?

Could feeding these poor quality foods for generations be the reason why so many pets today have allergies, weakened immune systems and the numerous diseases we hear pets have today? So what is a pet owner to do to assure their pet is eating a good quality food? Read labels, read books and call feed companies and ask about their sources for ingredients. The ones that are proud of their ingredients will gladly tell you. Some even have animal nutritionists available to speak with you. Price isn't a guarantee of quality; since some companies spend more money on those cute commercials than they do on the ingredients in the food. When reading labels remember, ingredients are listed in descending order by weight; so the first 3 or 4 make up the bulk of the food. They should consist of good meat sources (preferably more than one source); digestible grain sources such as brown rice, oats or barley. Look for good quality fats, such as chicken fat or flaxseed oil.

Digestive enzymes are very helpful for digesting dry foods. They can come in the food or be added. Avoid foods with by-products, chemical additives, flavorings and preservatives. Fortunately there are many nutritious pet foods available. They use only U.S.D.A. approved meats and ingredients fit for human consumption. These companies are dedicated to making natural pet foods; unfortunately, labeling laws do not allow them to state these facts on the label; so it's up to the consumer to do the research to find out what's really in the food.

For further information on natural animal health, I suggest *Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats* by Richard H. Pitcairn, D.V.M., Ph.D. and *The Holistic Guide for a Healthy Dog* by Wendy Volhard and Kerry Brown, D.V.M.