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Do You Know What's in Your Dog's Food? Choose Wisely.

Dog Food Label Definitions from AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials)

Introduction: What you fed your dog can make a big impact on behavior and your dog's quality of life. Poor quality of food can lead to behavioral as well as medical issues.

Our advice? Do your research, choose wisely, ask your veterinarian for detailed advice, and get the best quality foods you can afford. Compare the first ingredients; especially look for good sources of protein. Avoid by-products, artificial preservatives, colors, and sweeteners. Add natural, healthy foods to kibble on a daily basis for variety and nutrition. The following are definitions which provide the basis for labeling in pet food ingredient lists.

MEAT (e.g., lamb, beef, chicken): "Meat is the clean flesh derived from slaughtered mammals 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 that accompanying and overlying fat and the portions of the skin, sinew, nerve, and blood vessels..."

POULTRY: "Poultry is the clean combination of flesh and skin with or without accompanying bone derived from the parts or whole carcasses of poultry or a combination thereof, exclusive of feathers, heads, feet, and entrails."

MEAT (e.g., lamb meal, beef meal): "Meat Meal is the rendered product from mammal tissues, exclusive of any added blood, hair, hoof, horn, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents except in such amounts as may occur unavoidably in good processing practices..."

POULTRY MEAL: "Poultry Meal is the dry rendered products derived from a combination of clean flesh and skin with or without accompanying bone derived from the parts or whole carcasses of poultry or a combination thereof, exclusive of feathers, heads, feet, and entrails..."

MEAT AND BONE MEAL: "Meat and Bone Meal is the rendered product from mammal tissues, including bone, exclusive of any added bone, 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: "Meat By-Products is 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..."

POULTRY BY-PRODUCTS: "Poultry By-Products must consist of non-rendered clean parts of carcasses of slaughtered poultry such as heads, feet, viscera..."

POULTRY BY-PRODUCT MEAL: "Poultry By-Product Meal consists of the ground, rendered, clean parts of the carcass of slaughtered poultry, such as necks, feet, undeveloped eggs, and intestines, exclusive of feathers, except in such amounts as may occur unavoidably in good processing practices..."

ANIMAL BY-PRODUCT MEAL: "Animal By-Product Meal is the rendered product from mammal tissues, exclusive of any added hair, hoof, horn, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents... This ingredient definition is intended to cover those individual rendered animal tissue products that cannot meet the criteria as set forth elsewhere in this section..."

ANIMAL DIGEST: "A material which results from chemical and/ or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and undecomposed 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 BY-PRODUCT MEAL: "The rendered product from animal tissues, exclusive of any added hair, hoof, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents, except in such amounts as may occur unavoidably in good processing practices."