

Cat Food Standards

Research and testing, checks and balances, ensures cat food products are healthy and safe.

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Veterinary nutritionists work to determine what nutrients cats need to function at optimum health, and as information surfaces it is shared with the pet food committee of the American Association of Feed Control Officials, an advisory board of state officials and United States Food and Drug Administration members. They ensure that products on the market are safe and properly labeled. The nutrient balance, more than the ingredients, are the focus of the nutritional adequacy. AAFCO establishes nutrient profiles, which are then adopted and enforced by state governments to ensure "complete and balanced" nutrition.

New formula development may take up to three years and goes through various steps of research and testing.

AAFCO feeding protocols-in which at least eight animals are fed within certain guidelines-offer manufacturers another means to substantiate claims on pet food labels.

Raw materials, usually consisting of grain, meat protein, fat, vitamins and minerals, undergo testing before the manufacturers accept them. They are inspected for moisture, color, odor, overall appearance and the absence of contaminants. Checks continue throughout the manufacturing process.

For example, to make canned food, frozen ingredients go to a tempering area where the meat is ground into various-sized chunks and mixed with grains and other ingredients to form a liquid. The mixture is then heated and goes through checks for moisture control, protein and temperature. Then it moves into a can filler/seamer. The cans, filled with liquid, go into the retort system which cooks the food and sterilizes the can. After the cans cool they are sorted, labeled and visually inspected, and samples are analyzed to ensure the cans are sterile.