

All About Pet Food Labels

Pet food labels must meet strict standards. Learn about the regulations pet food manufacturers must follow.

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Pet food labeling regulations are mainly determined at the state level. Each state has a feed control official responsible for overseeing the marketing including the labeling of all animal feeds within that state.

Most states adopted the regulations recommended by the Association of American Feed Control Officials. These regulations include specific rules regarding what can and cannot be placed on the labels of pet foods.

The name and address of the manufacturer must be on the label, as well as the net weight of the product. Of course, the name of the product must also be present, and the words used in the product name must conform to AAFCO regulations. For example, a product cannot be named "fish" unless it contains no less than 95 percent by weight of fish. If a product contains at least 25 percent but less than 95 percent fish, the title may include fish but must also have a descriptive term, such as dinner or platter, in the title.

The label must also contain a "guaranteed analysis," a statement providing data on the minimum concentrations of protein and fat and the maximum concentrations of water and fiber in the product.

In addition to the guaranteed analysis, the label must contain a list including all the feed ingredients used in manufacturing the product in decreasing order of prevalence. AAFCO regulations also have specific definitions for each ingredient.

With certain exceptions, like snacks, a pet food label must contain a statement that the product meets the requirements for one or more of the recognized categories of nutritional adequacy, such as growth or maintenance.

Finally, AAFCO pet food regulations require that cat food labels contain recommended feeding instructions.

If a claim is made that a cat food contains toxic substances, the FDA will investigate the claim and take appropriate action. Also, requests for new additions to pet foods must be found by the FDA to be generally recognized as safe. If a claim is made that a cat food provides a therapeutic benefit, like preventing urinary tract disease, the FDA also has the responsibility to require appropriate data to support that claim.

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