

Organic and Natural Cat Food Quiz

Are you a nutritionally savvy pet food shopper?

By Rebecca Sweat

Posted: May 13, 2008 3 p.m. EDT

When you're shopping for cat food, it's hard not to notice the abundance of feline diets and treats labeled "organic" and "all natural" on pet store and supermarket shelves.

It's important to understand exactly what you're getting when you buy these types of products for your cat. Otherwise, you may be spending extra money for a product that really doesn't offer superior nutritional value.

How good are you at deciphering "organic" and "natural" claims on product labels, advertisements and in-store promotional materials? Take the quiz below to find out.

1. What U.S. government agency regulates "natural" claims on pet food labels?
 - a. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - b. The Humane Society of the United States
 - c. The President's Council on Pet Food Research and Standards
 - d. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO)
2. The U.S. Government strictly regulates "organic" claims on pet food labels.
True
False
3. A product using only plant and animal ingredients, and those ingredients are not highly processed, is generally classified as:
 - a. organic
 - b. holistic
 - c. natural
 - d. hormone-free
4. Food products made from livestock raised without growth hormones, steroids or antibiotics; fruit, vegetables and grains that have not been treated with pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilizers; and only natural preservatives are added to the final product are classified by the USDA as what kind of food?
 - a. organic
 - b. holistic
 - c. natural
 - d. human grade
5. All organic products are natural, but not all natural products are organic.
True
False
6. Although there is not a legal definition for what constitutes certified 100 percent organic pet food at this time, many pet food manufacturers still make this claim. How confident should you be that a pet food indeed is organic when a manufacturer makes this claim on the label?
 - a. Totally skeptical
 - b. Not confident
 - c. Somewhat confident
 - d. Very confident
7. What does the label claim "made with organic ingredients" mean?
 - a. The food includes both organic and natural ingredients
 - b. The food is at least 30 percent organic
 - c. The food is at least 70 percent organic

d. The food only uses organic ingredients

8. A cat food made with factory-farmed chicken, white rice, conventionally-grown soybeans, corn that was genetically-modified to be mildew-resistant, animal fat preserved with BHA (a chemical preservative), coloring agents, and synthetic vitamins and minerals would most likely be classified by AAFCO in what way?

- a. Conventional pet food product
- b. Natural
- c. Organic
- d. Kitty junk food

9. If you see “holistic” or “human grade” on a pet food label instead of “all natural,” you can be reasonably certain that the food is a natural product.

- True
- False

10. A cat food that is “vitamin-enriched” cannot be a truly “all-natural” product.

- True
- False

11. Natural cat diets have been scientifically proven to be effective at helping which of the following health conditions?

- a. Gastrointestinal disorders
- b. Skin problems
- c. Weight management issues
- d. None of the above

12. It is very difficult to formulate an all-natural, “complete and balanced” pet food.

- True
- False

13. If “all natural” is on the pet food label, you’re always going to be better off than if the label doesn’t make this claim.

- True
- False

14. If there are many difficult-to-pronounce ingredients on the label, it’s probably not a “natural” product.

- True
- False

15. How can you know for certain if a pet food is really made from all-natural ingredients?

- a. Trust the manufacturer’s “all natural” claim on the label
- b. Read the manufacturer’s latest press releases about the product
- c. Smell the food to see if you can detect any chemical odors
- d. Carefully read the label

16. Organic foods always provide better nutrition than inorganic products.

- True
- False

17. Which of the following preservatives could be used in an “all-natural” pet food?

- a. Ethoxyquin
- b. Antioxidants such as vitamin E or vitamin C
- c. Butylated hydroxy toluene (BHT)
- d. Butylated hydroxy anisole (BHA)

18. For a pet food to be truly organic, the plants used in the ingredients must be grown using particular agricultural methods. Which of the following farming techniques would not be used on an organic produce farm?

- a. Crop rotations
- b. Mulch to control weeds
- c. Treatment with chemical weed killers and fertilizers
- d. Manure to nourish plants

19. Conventionally-grown produce and livestock are generally less expensive than organic foods.

True
False

20. The number of “natural” and “organic” cat foods on the market is primarily dictated by what?

- a. Market demand
- b. Scientific research that natural/organic foods are healthier than inorganic ingredients
- c. Pressures from the manufacturing sector
- d. All of the above

SCORING

Score one point for each correct answer using the answer key below.

ANSWER KEY

1. D. This is the government arm which regulates standards for pet and livestock food, including what types of ingredients can and can't be used, how the ingredients list is to be worded, and what types of claims can be made on product labels. This includes a strict definition for what constitutes a “natural” product and what doesn't.
2. False. While there is a “certified organic” designation that has a legal definition in human food, which is regulated by the USDA, there is not yet a definition for “certified organic” in pet foods. However, this is something that the Pet Food Task Force (a government committee established by the National Organic Standards Board) is working on. The hope is to have a legal definition for “certified organic pet food” approved by the USDA sometime in the near future. This will be another standard for pet food which AAFCO will regulate.
3. C. If anything “manmade” is added — including chemically-synthesized vitamins and minerals, preservatives and artificial flavorings and colors — the product cannot be classified as “all natural.”
4. A. Every country has its own set of criteria that must be met in order to label a food as “certified organic.” In the United States, the USDA is the agency in charge of setting these standards for the human food industry. Pet food manufacturers generally use the same basic standards to define organic pet food, although they don't always agree on all the details. The pet food industry is waiting for an official or legal definition of what constitutes certified organic pet food.
5. True. For a food product to be considered organic (whether for humans or pets) the meat and agricultural ingredients must be organic (meaning no hormones or antibiotics were given to livestock; and no chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides were used on crops), and no synthetic preservatives, colorings or flavorings were added to the final product. For a food product to be classified as “natural,” all of the ingredients must come from nature — generally plant, animal or mined sources — and no “manmade” or artificial ingredients can be added. The agricultural ingredients in a natural product do not have to come from organic sources. Therefore, all “organic” products are indeed “natural,” but not all natural products are organic.
6. B. There is still some disagreement about what constitutes organic pet food. What one company may consider an organic product might be different from another manufacturer. Many in the industry believe that once an organic pet food definition is indeed finalized, many pet foods that claim to be “organic” will no longer comply and will need to be reformulated if their makers intend for them to continue in the marketplace.
7. C. Not all, but the majority of the ingredients in the food has been certified organic. This is an important distinction, because pet food (according to the definition pending approval with the USDA) must have at least a 95 percent organic content to be able to make a “certified organic” claim. Pet diets often have considerably less of a percentage of organic content, and the only claim that can legally be made on the label is that the food is “made with organic ingredients.” The same percentages hold true for organic classifications of human food.
8. A. It could not be classified organic, because conventionally-farmed meat and agricultural products were used. It wouldn't be considered natural, since synthetic preservatives, colorings and vitamin and mineral supplements were added. It certainly wouldn't be junk food, either, because the food probably does provide good nutrition — even if some of the ingredients come from manmade sources.
9. False. These two words don't have any sort of regulatory definition in the pet food industry.

10. True. Most vitamins and minerals are chemically-synthesized. A truly natural food only uses ingredients from plant, animal or mined sources. A manufacturer could, however, put "Natural with added vitamins and minerals" on the label for a cat food that is 100 percent natural except for the manmade vitamins and minerals that have been added to it.
11. D. There have been no scientific studies proving whether "natural" diets are healthier for pets than conventional pet foods.
12. True. Manufacturers commonly add some chemically synthetic vitamins and minerals to their pet food in order to provide "complete and balanced nutrition," which you can't do with a food that's truly natural.
13. False. A pet food could include a lot of unrefined sugar, salt, meat by-products or even road-kill, such as dead raccoons and squirrels. While these are "all natural" ingredients, they're certainly not healthy foods for pets. The AAFCO set precise standards for which foods meet the dietary guidelines for different pets and livestock. There are strict definitions for what types of by-products are acceptable pet food ingredients; things like feathers, hooves and horns are not included on the list.
14. True. Once you start stumbling at your pronunciation, it's a dead giveaway that those are artificial or synthetic ingredients!
15. D. Look over the label to see if there are any ingredients other than what comes from animal, plant or mined sources.
16. False. Just because a food is organic does not mean it contains the perfect balance of nutrients for your cat. There can, however, be a lot of pluses with organic ingredients. For instance, studies have shown that organically-raised chickens contain more omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin E and beta-carotene than conventionally-raised chickens. At the same time, it's also true that the natural pesticides used to grow organic food increases the odds that mold, bugs and animal manure could cause contamination.
17. B. Vitamins E and C are natural preservatives derived from plants.
18. C. All of the other techniques are natural methods to control weeds and nourish crops.
19. True. Organic food is generally more expensive than pet food made with conventionally-grown/raised ingredients. Organic farming methods often yield lower numbers of crops, livestock and eggs than conventional farming techniques, so the organic farmers have to charge more to make a profit.
20. A. Manufacturers are responding to consumer demand for organic and natural products.

IF YOU SCORED:

- 1-5 points — You're usually in a hurry when shopping and don't want to take the time to read product labels. Taking this quiz was a step in the right direction toward becoming a pet food expert.
- 5-10 points — You've got an idea about what to look for in pet food, but still have some studying to do.
- 11-15 points — You've got a good idea of what foods you should and shouldn't buy for your pet.
- 16-20 points — You are a nutritionally-savvy shopper! Your pet is very lucky.

Rebecca Sweat is a freelance writer specializing in pet and family topics. She lives in the Dallas area with her husband, two sons and many pets.

Next Quiz:
Pick the "Purr-fect" Present for Any Cat Lover