



# Feed That Dog!

(Everything You Need to Know About Dog Food - But Didn't Know to Ask!)

## Introduction

In 1860, a young American electrician made his way to England to sell lightening rods. Saddened by his lack of success in this venture, he looked for other opportunities to sustain himself. Spending perhaps too much time around the sailing ships, he noticed that the ship's cooks routinely fed the dock dogs left over biscuits. The young man was impressed by the convenience of this method of feeding and the fitness of these animals and so, using more guesswork than science, formulated the first dog food biscuit from vegetables, wheat, beet root and what ever meat was handy. In 1890, his company went public, opened a plant in the United States and James Spratt became a very wealthy man.

Several US companies followed Spratt's lead and after World War I, introduced canned horsemeat to their dog food lines. The 1930's saw the introduction of dry meat meals to the pet food industry allowing more concentrated meat protein sources to be used in manufacture and the 1950's brought about the ultimate revolution - extrusion. This process allowed the food to be cooked in a more timely manner while reducing processing costs. It was this, above all else, that allowed commercial dog food to be available to the masses.

Since it's humble beginnings, the manufacturing of pet food has become a multibillion dollar industry with more than 500 brands, types and formulations available. Million of dollars are spent media hype, Madison Avenue advertising, and beautiful packaging. The array is truly astounding... and overwhelming! How do you pick

the best food for your pet given all the choices? Thankfully, there are easy guide lines you can follow to assure that you are doing the best for your canine companion.

## Read Those Ingredients

While it can be stated an inexpensive dog food uses lower quality ingredients to keep the price low, it can not be assumed that an expensive dog food uses a better quality of ingredients. Marketing, advertising, and pretty bags all have their cost. It becomes the responsibility of the pet owner to make sure that the food they are buying reflects the price of quality ingredients and not just the quality of the advertising and marketing campaign. This can be accomplished by familiarizing yourself with the ingredient information printed on every bag.

By law, all dog food in the United States must clearly list their ingredients. Further, and again by law, these ingredients must be listed by weight in descending order. It is this ingredient panel that first gives a clue as to the suitability of a dog food.

Dogs are carnivores. This means that they require meat protein and the amino acids that make up that protein to be happy and healthy. **Always choose a dog food that lists a specified meat protein as the first ingredient followed further down the ingredient panel by other meat protein sources.** Multiple meat protein sources guarantee that your pet is receiving all the amino acids that he needs - and eliminates the need to use additives or mix foods to achieve proper balance.

**Reject any food that lists a grain**

as the first ingredient. Grains do not contain and therefore can not supply the complete package of amino acids required for the good health of your pet. Additionally, they are difficult to digest due to the dog's lack of salivary digestive amylase. This often leads to large stool volume and frequency as your pet tries to rid itself of the undigested matter.

Wheat, corn and soy are the grains most predominantly used in dog food. They are inexpensive and easy for the manufacturer to obtain and a way to keep costs low. They also have the dubious distinction of being the top three allergy response causing stimuli for our canine companions. Best to stay clear of these ingredients all together no matter where they show up in the ingredient panel!

**Reject any food that uses non-specified types of meat proteins.** Many foods use "Meat Meal" as an ingredient. This non-specified meat can be virtually anything from rendered road kill to euthanized dog and cat. It is unstable in it's makeup, suspect in it ability to deliver the required amino acids, and changes with the type of animal rendered. It truly is "Mystery Meat Meal."

**Reject any food that uses any type of by-products.** By-products are the castoff and waste derived from manufacturing food for human consumption. When you see that chicken in the grocery store, the portions that are NOT in the package are the by-products and include most of the internal organs, the head and the feet. While these are not strictly bad for dogs, the by-products rarely supply a complete amino acid balance. Further, because they are considered waste, they are generally not handled in such

## Feed That Dog!

(Everything You Need to Know About Dog Food - But Didn't Know to Ask!)

a way as to preserve their integrity.

**Reject any food that lists a meat rather than a meat meal as its first ingredient.** Most of us are familiar with the McDonald's Quarter Pounder disclaimer which states that their quarter pound hamburgers weigh in at a quarter of a pound *before cooking*. This is due to the fact that cooking releases the water out of the burger and it weighs significantly less when presented on the bun. So it is with meat and meat meal.

A specified meat meal is nothing more or less than a specified meat (i. e., Chicken or Lamb or Beef) with its water removed. A specified meat meal is a much more concentrated source of protein. Further, and knowing that the ingredient labels are required, by law, to list ingredients by weight in descending order, the use of a specified meat meal gives a truer picture of the amount of meat protein in the food. Water weighs a lot! To include this water weight when calculating position in an ingredient panel could almost seem deceptive as it does not accurately reflect the position of the meat in relation to the other ingredients after all has been cooked.

### And What About Preservatives?

Preservatives are a necessary evil in all facets of food production - both animal and human. Ingredients must be stabilized to withstand transport, manufacture and processing, and then delivery to the end user via distributors and retailers. This stabilization is achieved through the use of various preservatives - some naturally occurring, some man-made. All must be listed on the ingredient panels.

The current trend is away from man-made (chemical) preservatives

to those that are naturally occurring ... with very good reason! The man-made preservatives, while being excellent at their job of food preservation, also carry a level of toxicity.

**B** Ethoxyquin, for example, is a Monsanto made preservative. Originally used as a rubber stabilizer for the making of tires, it found its way into the pet food industry. It has a toxicity level of 3 out of 6 - six being so toxic that 7 drops would kill a human - and has been implicated in birth defects, liver failure, cancers and infertility.

**B** BHA and BHT are also commonly used in pet foods as preservatives. Listed as a poison by the American Poison Control Center, both are known to neurological damage, and kidney and liver dysfunction.

**P** Propylene Glycol is another preservative/ flavor enhancer to steer clear of. A cousin to anti-freeze (ethylene glycol), this sweet tasting preservative is often used in moist treats as it helps retain moisture while preserving the product. According to the SPCA, it is only 3 times less toxic than its insidious cousin.

It is probably needless to say but **reject any dog food that uses ethoxyquin, BHA, BHT or propylene glycol as preservatives.** Opt instead for food which use natural preservation by the use of Vitamin C, Vitamin E (listed often as Tocopherals), Rosemary, or a mixture of these.

Please note: When buying a dog food, treat it as you would your own food. Store it away from heat, light and moisture.

In addition, do not empty bag after bag of food into storage containers without first thoroughly cleaning the container. The fats from the food will coat the inside of the storage container and eventually turn rancid!

### Dog Food Check List

- Look for multiple meat protein sources
- Look for meat protein sources that are listed as a specific type of meat meal (Chicken Meal, Lamb Meal, Turkey Meal)
- Look for a food that is preserved with natural preservatives (Vitamin C, Vitamin E, Rosemary, or a mixture of these)
- Reject any food that lists a grain as the first ingredient
- Reject any food that contains wheat, corn or soy
- Reject any food that uses by-products or unnamed and unspecified meats.
- Reject any food that does not use Specified Meat Meals
- Reject any food that uses the chemical preservatives Ethoxyquin, BHA, BHT or Propylene Glycol

And when all is said and done, question anything you don't understand!