

Consumer Trends: Pet Owners Confused About Nutrition

MIAMI (PRNewswire) — A recent [petMD](#) [1] survey on the topic of pet nutrition revealed confusion among pet owners regarding the nutritional needs of dogs and cats. While 57 percent of respondents rightfully look to [pet food labels](#) [2] for information about the ingredients in their pet's food, what is written on the labels is often misinterpreted.

"Understanding how to feed our pets properly is critical to their well-being," states Dr. Jennifer Coates, a spokesperson for petMD. "This knowledge gap is worrisome, but also represents an opportunity for improving the health and longevity of our beloved companion animals."

The survey's key findings include:

1. **Misunderstood Terms:** A majority of survey respondents said they believe that animal hair, teeth and hooves are included in meat by-products, when in fact, the [Association of American Feed Control Officials](#) [3] (AAFCO) expressly prohibits these body parts from being included in a by-product used in pet food.
2. **The Importance of Feeding Trials:** While the majority of pet owners look to the label to learn about ingredients, they fail to look for other key quality information. According to the petMD survey, only 22 percent of respondents check to see if the diet has undergone a feeding trial. All AAFCO approved pet foods must display a statement indicating how the pet food manufacturer determined that particular diet would meet the needs of pets. This can be done in one of two ways: via a computer program or by actually feeding the food to dogs or cats. According to Coates, "feeding trials are a far superior method for determining whether or not pets will thrive on a particular diet."
3. **Misidentifying Potential Allergies:** More than 40 percent of respondents cited grain ingredients as the most common allergens in pet food, with more than 30 percent specifically implicating corn. However, some studies have shown that the protein or meat source in pet food is far and away the biggest culprit¹.
4. **An Under-appreciation of Balanced Nutrition:** 69 percent of respondents recognized that protein is a key nutrient for pets, yet only 2 percent named fats, 3 percent named carbohydrates, and less than 25 percent named vitamins and minerals. "To satisfy all the nutritional needs of dogs and cats, pet foods must provide all of these ingredients in the right balance," states Coates. "Too much of one or too little of another can be harmful to a pet's health."
5. **Skepticism of Label Accuracy:** More than 70 percent of pet owners

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surveyed believe pet food labels do not list all of the ingredients; however, AAFCO regulations mandate that every ingredient contained within a pet food be included in the ingredient list, in order from the biggest to the smallest contributor, by weight.

"Misconceptions surrounding pet food and canine and feline nutrition can lead owners to make ill-informed choices about what to feed their companions," states Coates. "Veterinarians are the best source of information about what to feed pets. They can take into consideration a pet's unique combination of life stage, lifestyle, and health to make individualized diet recommendations."

About petMD

petMD.com [1] is the leading online resource focused solely on the health and well-being of pets. The site maintains the world's largest pet health library, written and approved by a network of trusted veterinarians.

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[1] <http://www.petmd.com/>

[2] http://www.petmd.com/cat/nutrition/evr_multi_deconstructing_pet_food_labels

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