



1401 W. Webster Avenue • Chicago, Illinois 60614 • 773.935.2311 • FAX 773.305.4059 • [www.FamilyPetAnimalHospital.com](http://www.FamilyPetAnimalHospital.com)

## 9 IMPORTANT PET NUTRITION FACTS

Do you know enough about pet food labels to be able to know what to look for in order to maximize the health of your pet? Do you know about what is in your patient's food? Learn more about pet food label requirements from the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO).

1. Does your pet's food boast the label "**holistic**"? Don't believe it. There is no legal definition of the term under pet food laws, so **anyone can claim that their food is "holistic."**
2. We hear the word "**natural**" all the time, but what does it actually mean? According to AAFCO, the term "natural" requires a pet food to consist of only natural ingredients that have **not been subjected to chemical synthesis**. Natural does not mean that a food is also organic.
3. So what is organic? Foods that are labeled "**organic**" must be certified as organic in accordance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and AAFCO regulations. In order for a product to carry the USDA organic seal, **at least 95 percent of its content must be organic** by weight. To be organic, the components of a product must be grown with only animal or vegetable fertilizers, such as manure, bone meal compost, etc.
4. **Are by-products bad?** Not really! A "by-product" simply means whatever is left over after initial/intended production. They may actually be *the best thing* to feed pets because of the nutrition they contain and because they use parts of animals that would otherwise be thrown away when producing human food. Bully sticks, lamb lungs, and rawhides are all by-products! By-products also include vegetable oils, chicken fat, and **pork, chicken and beef liver** – the internal organs of animals used for human consumption that would otherwise be trashed. *Feeding by-products = green living.*
5. **Always choose a pet food labeled to provide "complete and balanced nutrition":** If your pet's food says something to the effect of "*This food is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the Association Feed Control Officials (AAFCO)...*" it means that the food did not undergo actual feeding or digestibility trials. The formulation method is quicker and cheaper, but does not document the effect on animals. What you want to read on your pet's food label is this: "*Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that this food provides complete and balanced nutrition...*"
6. **Ingredients** are listed in descending order by their predominance by weight. However, weight values are not included in the ingredient statement, meaning that the listed ingredients could vary by weight only **.1 percent**, or by **20 percent**.
7. Pet foods that are labeled "**dinner**", "**platter**", "**entrée**", "**formula**", etc. are required to include **only 25 percent** of the main ingredient (chicken dinner, beef entrée, etc.). If you purchase a can of cat food labeled as "seafood entrée", the manufacturer is required to include **only 25 percent** seafood in the product.
8. If a label includes the phrase "**with ingredient X**", the pet food is required to contain **only 3 percent** of ingredient X (chicken, beef, seafood, etc.)
9. The only requirement for including the word "**flavor**" on a pet food package? It must be "**recognized by the pet.**"

*Find out more information at [www.aafo.org](http://www.aafo.org)*