

# PET FOOD LABELLING FAQs



**P**FMA is the leading trade body for the UK pet food industry, we have over 80 members producing a range of pet foods for cats, dogs, small mammals, fish, pet birds and wild birds. Our members are responsible for feeding the 50 million plus pets in the UK and we take that responsibility very seriously.

As an industry, we are committed to providing high quality, nutritious and safe pet food, and providing clear guidelines on how to responsibly feed pets. We are also committed to providing high quality, generic education information on pet food topics.

In this month's feature, we focus on pet food labelling and some of the questions mostly commonly raised so that pet retailers are well equipped to help owners.

## WHY ARE PET FOOD LABELS SO DIFFICULT TO DECIPHER?

We recognise that pet food labelling isn't always consumer friendly and that sometimes the terminology can be confusing. Pet food labelling falls under EU legislation for farm animal feed, meaning that the way information is listed on-pack is not always understandable for pet owners. It will be well understood by farmers though!

Despite the regulatory constraints, PFMA and its members are committed to providing pet owners with a better understanding of what is in their pet's food. This is why many pet food manufacturers provide full product information on company websites and have dedicated customer care lines to provide further support.

## WHY DO SOME PET FOODS LIST INGREDIENTS AND OTHERS ARE VAGUE – USING TERMS SUCH AS 'CEREALS'?

Current legislation means manufacturers can label ingredients by category or by individual ingredients. Listing ingredients by category means manufacturers can select ingredients based on supply without having the high cost of changing labels constantly and means they can deliver an economical product of high quality. For consumers who prefer to buy a pet food with a list of all individual ingredients, there are many of these products available too. It's about consumer choice and providing something to suit all needs and preferences.

## WHEN A LABEL SAYS MEAT AND ANIMAL DERIVATIVES (FOUR PERCENT CHICKEN) ON THE PET FOOD LABEL DOES THIS REALLY MEAN THAT THERE IS ONLY FOUR PERCENT MEAT IN THE PRODUCTS?

The pet food industry works hard to help consumers understand the legislation particularly surrounding labelling. For example, when a pet food label states four percent of a certain meat ingredient, this does not mean that the product contains only four percent meat. The four percent declaration is a legal labelling requirement which represents the minimum percentage content of the named ingredient guaranteed to be present by the manufacturer. Each recipe includes a blend of different ingredients which are all combined into a food which will meet, in part or entirely, the daily nutritional requirements of the pet.

## WHY DON'T PET FOOD LABELS PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION ON INGREDIENTS?

There is limited space on a pet food label and it is important that the minimum legally required information (e.g. description, directions for use, ingredients and feeding guidelines) is provided to the consumer. To support consumers, pet food manufacturers often provide full product information on company websites and via telephone helplines. All companies provide contact details to allow consumers to obtain further information and are legally required to disclose the specific ingredients within a labelled category on a product upon request.



## WHAT INGREDIENTS ARE TYPICALLY USED?

There is strict legislation for the ingredients which can be used in pet foods. For the animal based ingredients, these must come from animals that have been inspected under veterinary supervision and are considered fit for human consumption. Cuts that might not sound appealing to the UK consumer but which might be regularly on the menu in other cuisines or that have been eaten in the UK in the past (e.g. pig's trotters, or fried pig ears, udders) are used. The main concern for the pet food manufacturer is to source nutritionally valuable ingredients. Some of the less favoured cuts could be a perfect source of protein, essential amino acids or other valuable substances.

## USEFUL RESOURCES:

Watch PFMA's short two-minute animation on 'How pet food is made for cats and dogs'  
[www.pfma.org.uk/pet-food-film](http://www.pfma.org.uk/pet-food-film)

Understanding Pet Food Labels Factsheet:  
<https://www.pfma.org.uk/labelling-factsheet>

About pet food ingredients:  
[www.pfma.org.uk/using-the-right-ingredients](http://www.pfma.org.uk/using-the-right-ingredients)

