

# Pet Food Label Ingredient List

*The ingredient list on the pet food label serves two opposite objectives simultaneously. It displays the food components for customers, while protecting the trade secret of the food's recipe. This discord implies that the ingredient list provides limited information. Furthermore, the naming as well as order of ingredients, are not sufficiently clear. Pet owners, with preferences or dislikes in food items, may perceive the ingredient statement as helpful. The information found in the ingredient list depends on the country where the food is sold. Herein, the common situations are addressed.*



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**A**n ingredient is a raw or processed agricultural commodity or other nutrient source. Complete dog or cat food consists of a specific mixture of ingredients. The manufacturer has to consider each ingredient as based on legitimacy, nutrient levels, digestibility, palatability, safety, functionality, experience, availability and cost. Every ingredient furnishes dietary benefit or has a function in the food. Pet food also contains additives to enhance its characteristics.

## Naming of Ingredients

Ingredients are defined and allowed for use in pet food by competent

authorities. The dictated terms may only be printed on the label for ingredients that match the descriptions. Other terms are acceptable, provided they properly describe the ingredients used. The type of ingredient is stated by an individual name, but in many countries it can also be grouped under various categories as stipulated in the regulations.

The two ingredient lists, shown in the frame, are for the same dog food, but they consist of individual or group names. Grouping of ingredients by categories makes the list less informative. For the manufacturer, it means some batch-to-batch flexibility in selecting ingredients within categories. Clearly, the

nutrient contents in the analysis panel must always remain valid.

Ingredient names do not provide sufficient information about nutritional value. Ingredients with identical names can differ significantly in nutrient content and availability. Grouped ingredients cannot be evaluated regarding quality.

## Order of Ingredients

By the law, ingredients must be listed in descending order by percentage weight. There is a tolerance limit for each declared ingredient. Thus, the actual composition of foods with ingredients declared by individual names can vary somewhat between production batches, depending on availability and market prices of ingredients.

Some ingredients can legally be split into different forms or components that are stated separately on the label. The split ingredients appear further down on the list than the ingredient used. By definition, unchanged ingredient names move upwards. For example, wheat can be split into ground wheat and wheat

meal. Splitting also is feasible by entering component names such as wheat flour, wheat bran, wheat germ meal and wheat middlings, which correspond with milling derivatives. Declaring split items causes other ingredients to rise, to a higher position on the list.

Canned products contain ingredients with different amounts of moisture. Because of ranking by weight, moist ingredients tend to appear higher on the list than dry ingredients. Nutrients are present in the water-free or dry-matter fraction of ingredients rather than in the water constituent. Therefore, the water-rich ingredients high on the list, thus can contribute a low proportion of whole-food nutrients.

Major dry-food ingredients are generally low in moisture, so the ingredient list reflects their relative contribution to the dry-matter fraction of the end product. However, the declared composition could relate to a virtual recipe, containing the ingredients with their original water content. Through this approach, animal ingredients shift further up the

list. When fresh meat is used in the production of dry food, it can become first on the ingredient list because of its high moisture content.

Regular dry foods contain 50 to 70 percent grains and thus often are grain-first. Nevertheless, in these foods animal protein can supply a substantial portion of total protein. In the individual-name-based ingredient statement shown, barley containing about 10 percent protein appears first and dehydrated poultry (poultry meal) containing about 60 percent protein ranks second. Total food protein consists of 67 percent animal and 33 percent plant protein.

The first ingredient can often be misinterpreted or overvalued. Pet owners preferring meat-first foods should be aware that ingredients can be listed according to different principles.

## Preferred and Rejected Ingredients

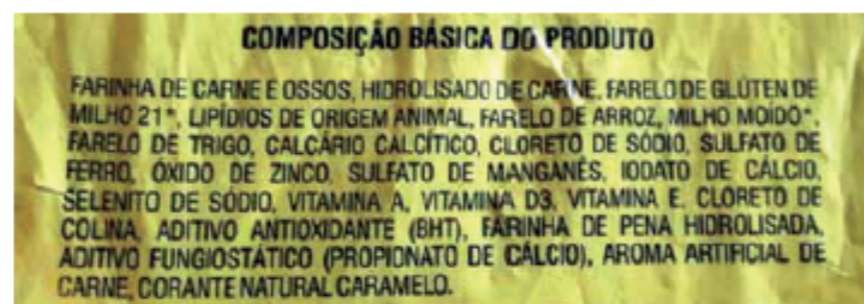
Manufacturers select ingredients after considering many factors. Pet owners, who prefer or reject certain ingredients, can select favourable foods using the ingredient list. For instance, they may look for foods with specific meat type, no-wheat or grain-free diets, or they may wish to avoid foods containing feather meal.

## Ingredient Lists by Individual or Category names for the Same Dry Dog Food

**Individual Names:** Barley, Dehydrated poultry, Animal fat (poultry), Dried beet pulp, Rice, Rice bran, Minerals (monocalcium phosphate, sodium chloride), Hydrolysed chicken liver.

**Category Names:** Cereals, Meat and animal derivatives, Derivatives of vegetable origin, Oils and fats, Minerals.

*Dr Beynen will be writing this exclusive column on dog and cat nutrition and nutrition-related items every month.*



*Ingredient list in Portuguese language  
The food contains hydrolysed feather meal (farinha de pena hidrolisada)*

