

How We Rate Dog Food | Frequently Asked Questions

The following items represent some of The Dog Food Advisor's most [frequently asked questions](#) about how we rate the dog foods we choose to review on our website.

What method do you use to analyze each dog food?

Although there are many ways to rate a dog food, we've settled on using the only information we feel we can reliably trust.

We read and interpret government-regulated and standardized pet food labels. Nothing more. And we do this in two simple steps.

1. We study the ingredients list
2. We estimate the [meat content](#)

How important is meat content to your ratings?

We recognize that protein fed in excess of the minimum nutritional requirement of an animal is simply burned as energy... which is not an "efficient" process.

However, we also believe in the commonsense logic of mimicking a [dog's natural ancestral diet](#)... a design which attempts to create a food that's more what an animal would consume "in the wild".

So, we shamelessly favor dog foods rich in **meat**.

How often do you update your reviews?

Although it's our goal to maintain the accuracy of our reviews, it's impossible for anyone to keep all the information for thousands of products up-to-date on a daily basis.

However, we do revisit and update each article at least once every 18 months... or more frequently whenever we're alerted by a reader or a company of a recipe change.

How can you be sure a product label is accurate?

The United States Food and Drug Administration regulates all pet food labels. Taken directly from the [FDA website](#)...

"The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FFDCA) requires that pet foods, like human foods, be safe to eat, produced under sanitary conditions, contain no harmful substances, and be **truthfully labeled**."

Any manufacturer breaching this rule would be in violation of U.S. Federal Law.

Why are the protein and fat percentages in your reviews different from those on the product's label?

Because all foods (even human food) contain various amounts of moisture, it would be unfair to compare the protein and fat figures of different products.

So, we use “dry matter basis” to report the nutrient content of every dog food we review. This method mathematically removes all the water from each product.

To learn more, be sure to read my article, “[Dry Matter Basis... the Only Fair Way to Compare Dog Foods](#)”.

How do you determine the star rating of a product?

We’re focused on ingredients, nutrient profiles and recipes.

We tend to dislike dog foods made with low quality plant or generic animal by-products. And we downgrade recipes that use controversial chemical preservatives or plant-based protein boosters.

Yet because we respect a [dog’s natural carnivorous bias](#), we shamelessly favor dog foods rich in meat.

How do you determine the “overall” brand rating?

Dog food recipes and sub-brands can have vastly different ratings.

So, to determine the overall rating of a particular brand, we use our own proprietary system to weight the scores of each review to favor the importance of certain factors over others.

These factors can include (but are not limited to) the popularity of each product, the [relative superiority and safety practices](#) of its manufacturer and the professional qualifications of its designers.

Why do some products have different star ratings than other recipes within the same review?

Some recipes within the same review earn higher or lower ratings based on our estimate of their total meat content and (when appropriate) their fat-to-protein ratios.

Products with low meat content or with fat-to-protein ratios over 80% are reduced by *at least* a half star... sometimes more.

What would a top-rated dog food look like?

In general, a five star dog food is one that is high in meat content and free of any generic animal by-products, suspicious chemicals or plant-based protein boosters or concentrates.

Why don’t you consider the source of a food’s ingredients?

Like you, we truly wish there was a reliable way to know the source of each and every ingredient in a dog food.

But unfortunately, there isn’t.

Not only do most pet food companies conceal the origin of their ingredients, they also change the

sources as well as the quality of those ingredients on a regular basis.

And they're not required to advise consumers (or reviewers) when they do.

Why is the origin of each ingredient so difficult to pin down?

Many raw materials used to make dog foods are bought and sold in commercial-sized lots on the open market.

Bulk prices vary. And so does quality.

From day to day, it's not unusual for an ingredient to come from a different farm, a different storage facility or a different state.

Even a different country.

Do you test the dog foods you review?

As a small, independent website, The Dog Food Advisor does not have the resources needed to test the thousands of dog food recipes reviewed on our site.

In fact, not even the U. S. Food and Drug Administration has the resources to tackle such a mammoth job.

So, we must rely almost entirely on the integrity of the information posted by each company on its website.

As such, the accuracy of every review is directly dependent upon the test results from whatever **specific batch** of food a company chooses to publish.

Are third party test results posted on the web considered reliable?

Each dog food you buy is only as good as the last batch from which it was made.

And unfortunately, due to variations in raw materials, processing conditions and ingredient sources, finished dog foods can vary notably from batch to batch.

To be truly useful, tests should be scientifically conducted by high quality commercial laboratories using samples collected from multiple batches.

So, relying on well-meaning websites and other third parties that publish single batch test results on statistically insignificant sample sizes can be extremely misleading to consumers.

Why don't you consider the additional information found on product packaging and company websites?

Unfortunately, company information can be biased. And much of it is only minimally regulated by the government.

That's why we're reluctant to simply re-broadcast a manufacturer's marketing message. We fear it could be misleading and provide a false sense of security to our readers.

Why don't you consider a company's recall history or other news events when you

rate a product?

So far, we've never been able to find a single scientific study proving the predictive ability of any (human or pet) food recall to reliably forecast another. Most recall events appear to be completely random (and unpredictable).

Since 2008, our ratings have had nothing whatsoever to do with recall histories, legal findings, rumors, lawsuits, customer service incidents, ingredient sources, processing temperatures, feeding style biases (raw versus dry) or any other opinion-based variable.

Each dog food on our website is rated based upon comparison with other products in its own relevant category.

Dry foods are rated based upon comparison with other dry foods. And that same standard applies to wet and raw foods, too.

How do lawsuits affect your ratings?

Unlike recalls, lawsuits are based on complaints and accusations only.

And when they result in a settlement, the truth or falsehood of the allegations are usually not revealed to the public.

Each of our reviews is based upon the factual information we retrieve from government-regulated and standardized pet food labels... and nothing else.

If you'll Google the name of almost any major brand, you'll likely find hundreds of complaints, claims and lawsuits for many of their products.

Once any dog food has been confirmed to have a serious problem, the FDA expects the related company to voluntarily recall its product.

Until we know with certainty if a particular dog food has been tested and recalled, it would be unfair and irresponsible for us to consider unverified claims when writing our reviews.

Don't you need to be a veterinarian to read a pet food label?

Absolutely not. That would be like saying only a licensed medical doctor is qualified to read the side panel on a box of corn flakes.

Although some believe that to judge a dog food label one must possess a long list of educational accomplishments and veterinary credentials after his name, nothing could be further from the truth.

Anyone with a little dedication, a realistic knowledge about product labeling and the willingness to do a reasonable amount of research can learn to read a pet food label.

Why does my dog do better (or worse) on a specific product than your star rating would suggest?

Since there's no way for us (or anyone) to know how every dog will respond to a particular product, [our rating system](#) is not intended to suggest feeding a particular product will deliver specific results.

Each review is based upon government-regulated label information, ingredient quality and meat content only. And nothing else.

Where can I find information about what to expect from a specific dog food?

Our reviews have nothing to do with results. That's why we created a 2-way blog... to allow readers to share their real life experiences and results with others.

So, for a better idea about what to expect with any dog food, be sure to read the "Comments" section at the end of each review.

I can't find a review for a specific dog food on your website. But I am able to locate a review of the brand. Why?

In most cases, we rate dog foods by selecting a typical product to represent the full product line. We only rarely rate each individual product.

You can find a list of all the products included in a particular review near the beginning of each article.

Since so many readers are complaining about problems with a particular dog food, shouldn't you change your rating?

Our reviews and ratings have nothing to do with results and are based solely upon the label.

To see why we intentionally ignore everything else, please be sure to read our article, "[The Problem with Dog Food Reviews](#)".

Do you award a higher rating to dry, canned or raw dog foods?

All dog foods are judged against their peers. Dry to dry. Wet to wet. And raw to raw. When assigning star ratings, we never compare one type with another.

Is The Dog Food Advisor sponsored by a manufacturer?

Absolutely not.

We never accept money, gifts or free merchandise from any pet food manufacturer in exchange for special consideration in the preparation of our reviews or ratings. To learn more, please visit our [Disclaimer and Disclosure](#) page.