

Your Pet Will Be Thankful For High Quality Food!

Marketing Magic-Secret Tricks for Reading Pet Food Ingredients: Part III of V

By Nancy Secrist, Easdale: The Best Pet Care

A very large bag of brightly colored dog food plopped down inside our office door; prominently featured on the bag was a well-known TV celebrity! My new client followed through to the check-in desk with her beautiful yellow Labrador Retriever, and an ample bag of ear ointments, medicated shampoo, and sheets of instructions for their daily use. "What a beautiful girl," I commented as we began our boarding check-in. "Does she have chronic ear infections?" Her owner nodded and complained, "We tried every food in the pet section of the store, but she just has problems!" I reassured her that we would follow her medication and care instructions to the letter, but asked, "Where are you buying your food?" She replied, "We pick it up in the grocery store along with our other shopping." At this point, as any fictional detective would say, "Ah Ha--that's it!"

Grocery stores—Convenience ranks high with customers who like to purchase pet food with the family groceries. The problem lies in how grocery stores set up the profit margins on each item they stock or the dollar return on each square foot of space on the shelves. Grocery store pet foods are formulated with lower cost ingredients and lots of marketing aimed at impulse buyers and coupon shoppers. Be smart and cut straight to the ingredients list; we'll help you sort out the best value - but the better quality foods just aren't carried by the grocery stores!

Celebrities and Donations—"Buy my pet food because it's so tasty, just like on my cooking show!" Not only do you think of the yummy food you've seen on the show, but also every purchase makes a donation to a pet rescue charity. If you want to make a donation, just send a check to a worthy charity. Why make your pet eat a lower quality of food so that part of the money you spend to feed them can be donated? You may also be "donating" at the veterinarian's office when your pet has health problems because of malnutrition, even a shortened life span!

Deceptive packaging—This is a favorite pet peeve of mine. Full color photos on the packaging are another waste of your money. Not only is full color packaging expensive, it is also used to misrepresent the ingredients. One very popular food's packaging shows a cascade of red chunks of beef, peas, carrots, sweet corn, and other luscious looking veggies. If you read the ingredients, the veggies come in AFTER sugar, salt, and water—in a crunchy DRY dog food. The veggies do come in just before Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, and Blue 2. The beef is listed behind four (4) grains and chicken by-product meal, so what exactly are the by-products? Beaks? Feet? There is more SALT than veggies in this food!

TV ads—Stand back at the grocery aisle and look at the pet foods. Which one makes you think of snappy jingles and cute commercials with adorably funny dogs? Commercials during normal programming may run in excess of \$100,000 per 30-seconds. Production averages \$350,000 and higher per ad. The cost is tacked onto your purchase price. Cute ads with catchy slogans and jingles are the worst sign that the money you spend is NOT going into quality ingredients for your pet. If you find the semi-soft dry brand I'm thinking of, you'll know it when you check the ingredients and find that CORN SYRUP is required to get dogs to eat it and there is no meat listed at all, other than beef/bone meal. Watch out for words like "meaty" or "beefy." What they mean is that the taste is "LIKE meat" or "LIKE beef." When you see the "y" after an ingredient, you can be sure that there's little or NO meat or beef in there! This is a way to make grain based food sound better.

End caps/eye level shelving—the pet food industry is, excuse the expression, a "dog eat dog" competitive market. When you see a pet food sitting at the start of the food aisle or crowning space at the end of the aisle with a special display, know that the manufacturer is paying the store for that premium exposure. In other words, they don't think that you know what you are looking for and are unable to make your own decision. By the way, the store staff is often given gifts and told what to recommend by a company representative; they have little or no knowledge about pet nutrition. All this expense comes out of the price of the food you pay for - or is your pet paying the price?

What happened to the beautiful yellow Labrador who came to visit us? Her owner was satisfied with her pet food and fed it for many years. Her Labrador continued to have chronic ear infection and pain all her life with medications to be administered every stay with us. Sad to say, she was deaf by the age of seven. Our pets cannot talk, but we can still watch out for their best interests!

Coming up in Part IV—Mining for Minerals or Why Do Some Companies Think Your Dog Should Eat Rust For Their Iron?

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