

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

Whole Dog Journal™



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We Believe in You

You can make sound food selections for your dog with the guidance we've provided – and feedback from your dog!



I was flabbergasted when I read the advice of a prominent veterinary nutritionist that dog owners should do themselves a favor and “stop reading the ingredient list” of their dogs’ food. The basis of this suggestion seemed to be that ordinary dog owners are just too likely to favor foods that sound delicious but are not nutritious over less delicious-sounding products made by more reputable companies. Which, if you continued to follow along for a definition of “reputable,” had enough qualifiers as to include *only* the largest companies in the country, if not the world.

Sigh.

Well, I have faith in our readers; after all, you seem to be able to feed yourselves! Jokes aside, it’s absolutely true that there are companies that are using every marketing trick in the book to sell more dog food – by stacking the ingredients’ lists of their foods with trendy ingredients, giving the products colorful names (such as “Cowboy Cookout,” “Love at First Bark,” “Pacific Stream”), and making liberal use of bright photos of ripe fruits, fresh vegetables, and glistening steaks (even when the corresponding ingredients are actually powdered fruits, dried vegetables or pulp, and meat meal). And it has worked! Many of these products have gained significant market share by appealing to dog owners’ appetites.

But with a little guidance, we’re confident that you can learn to sort the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. We’ve given you *tons* of direction about the notes you should bring with you when you shop, what to look for on the labels, how to identify low-quality products, and more. Plus, our “approved dry foods list” (starting on page 10) contains dozens of companies that make good foods; you’ve got this!

Also in this issue: Don’t miss “Dogs in the Workplace” on page 14, which contains advice from a dog trainer who works in the office of a dog-related (non-profit) business about bringing your dogs to work. A long-time contributor to WDJ, Stephanie Colman’s training and dog-management advice is always very clear, positive, and effective. This is a helpful article for those who would like to bring their dogs to work – or for those who would like to give some friendly advice to a co-worker who brings naughty, unmanaged dogs to their workplace.

And finally, on page 18, a groundbreaking piece from our Training Editor Pat Miller, “Socially Conscious Sheltering.” Miller explains how the historic models for rescue and animal shelter management are dysfunctional, and introduces a progressive new model that can save dogs’ lives and keep the public safe from dangerous dogs, too.

NK



The Best Foods for Your Dog

Dogs have individual needs. The size and number of your dogs (and your budget) also affect your decisions. Here's how to choose foods to meet all your requirements.

We know that many of you subscribe to *Whole Dog Journal* in order to learn about dog food. We're also aware that, more specifically, many of you are hoping that we will tell you which foods are *best*; you want to know what you should be buying to feed *your* dog.

Well, we have some good news and some bad news for you!

First, the good news. In the next few pages, we are going to tell you a *lot* about dry dog food: what to look for (traits of good foods), what to look *out* for (traits of low-quality foods), what information that appears in giant letters or starbursts on the label is completely useless, what *tiny*-print information on the label is critically important, and more.

Now for the bad news. We can't tell you which products will be "best" for your dog, any more than we could tell you what foods would be "best" for you or your children.

Dogs are individuals, just like us. Some of us can eat junk food for years on end without suffering any signs of ill health – no indigestion, diabetes, heart disease, or cancer. For others, a single trip through a fast-food lane will cause almost immediate gastrointestinal upset.

Well, dogs are the same. We probably all know someone with a 15-year-old Labrador who has been fed Ol' Roy (one of the cheapest of the low-quality foods) his whole life; we don't hear as much about the dogs who were fed the same diet and died at age 8 *looking* like they were 15. And some dogs are fed diets of the very highest quality and have all sorts of health problems anyway.

The bottom line: One-size-fits-all recommendations don't work when it comes to diet. You have to feed the individual what works for him. It's wonderful when you

have more than one dog and they can both digest and thrive on the same variety of food, but we wouldn't take it for granted that any two dogs can.

IS THE HIGH PRICE RIGHT?

Here's a question we are asked a lot: "Is the most expensive food the best? Should I just buy that?"

The answer goes right back to what we were just saying: The most expensive foods on the market may well be very high in quality, but that doesn't mean they will suit *your* dog. Plus, not everyone can afford high-priced foods – and that doesn't make them bad dog owners.

That said, we will warn you away from the very lowest-cost foods. Most of them are more suitable for feeding chickens than dogs.

Our goals are to teach you how to identify the better-quality foods at any but the lowest price points and how to know if the products suit your dog.

Ready to shop? Read on! 🐾

It helps to bring a record of what you already feed your dog when you're ready to shop for some new foods. Make sure you have time to read labels and compare the nutritional adequacy statement and nutrient levels (more about this on the next pages).





Four Steps to Personalized Nutrition

Before you can improve his diet, make sure you understand what you already feed your dog and how it affects him.

Before you go shopping for some new dog foods, make sure you are familiar with the products you already feed your dog. Start by looking for the ingredients, guaranteed analysis, and nutritional adequacy statement.

The beginning of your dog food buying journey actually starts with what you feed your dog *right now*. You are feeding your dog something already, correct? *Good!* In order to make choices that will maintain or, better yet, improve your dog's health, you need to know what's in the food you already feed him. Otherwise, how can you make sound comparisons to new products? The first steps are:

1 Go look at the bag of food you are feeding your dog – and bring a pen and paper, or your cell phone, with you. Write down (or take a picture of) the ingredients list and the “guaranteed analysis” – the place on the label that lists how much protein and fat the food contains (among other things).

2 Make sure you know what the major ingredients are in your dog's food; don't just go by the name of the food. A food that says it's the company's “Chicken and Rice Variety” may also contain fish meal, for example. That's fine, unless fish makes your dog itchy!

Also, don't take for granted that the formula of a food that suits your dog particularly well is the same as it's always been; manufacturers often change their formulas from year to year, based on ingredient availability and cost. Many of us with dogs who are allergic to or intolerant of certain ingredients have been unpleasantly surprised by our dogs breaking out in hives or itching, only to discover (too late) that

the ingredients of a formerly “safe” food have been changed and now contain an ingredient that is problematic for our dog.

3 Now ask yourself a question: Are you happy with your dog's condition? Is his weight perfect? Or is he too fat or too thin? (By the way, we wouldn't take your vet's silence on this matter as a sign that your dog is *perfect*; in our experience, few vets choose to get into this matter with their clients unless/until a dog is morbidly obese or *super* thin and bony. And we've seen vets show far more concern over thin, fit dogs than fat, unfit dogs. Go figure.)

If you are pretty sure your dog is over his healthy weight, you should start your search for new foods with products that contain less fat – or, at most, the *same* amount of fat – that's in the food you give him now. To put it differently: If you think he is overweight or on his way there, don't buy a food that contains even *more* fat than what you feed him now.

In contrast, if you think your dog is too thin and has a hard time gaining weight, you probably should consider some foods that contain more fat than what you feed him currently.

If your dog is at an ideal weight, you should look for foods that contain around the same amount of fat and protein as you feed him now.

4 One more question: Does your dog have any health problems? Recurrent diarrhea or loose stools? Constant flatulence? Chronic itching? Excessive shedding? Ear infections? If so, consider looking for foods that contain different protein and carbohydrate sources than those found in the foods you currently feed. In order to do so, *before* you go shopping, you need to know what's in the products you regularly feed your dog.

If, let's say, your dog has terrible diarrhea or chronic ear infections and you ordinarily feed him foods that contain chicken and

rice, look for foods that contain no chicken or rice – perhaps ones that contain beef and barley, for instance.

You should also be aware of whether your dog has a predisposition to a health problem that can be precipitated or aggravated by diets with certain characteristics, so you can avoid foods with those attributes.

For example, Bedlington Terriers, Doberman Pinschers, West Highland White Terriers, Skye Terriers, and Labrador Retrievers are susceptible to copper storage hepatopathy; they should be fed diets with low levels of copper – as close as possible to the minimum required by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles.

READY TO SHOP

At this point, you should be much more knowledgeable about your dog's

SHOULD YOU BUY LOCALLY OR ONLINE?

BENEFITS OF BUYING LOCALLY

- ✓ Independent pet supply stores are more likely to have truly knowledgeable staff members who are familiar with the foods carried by the store.
- ✓ Having a well-supported local store means food will be available to you at any time the store is open.
- ✓ You can check date codes on the label to make sure the product is as fresh as possible.
- ✓ A local store makes it easy to return foods that your dog hates or that have been recalled.

BENEFITS OF BUYING ONLINE

- ✓ Delivery to your door is often free or inexpensive.
- ✓ Online ordering is highly convenient.
- ✓ Online prices are often competitive with stores.



Always look for the date code to make sure you are buying fresh product.

current food than you were previously; you should also know what details to look for on the labels of some new foods to try. *Now* you're ready to shop!

Just don't forget to bring the notes or pictures you took of your dog's current food ingredients, GA, and AAFCO statement for comparison. 🐾

In the Fine Print: Nutritional Adequacy Statements

It's bizarre, but one of the most important things on a pet food label is often in the tiniest print: the nutritional adequacy statement, aka the "AAFCO statement."

AAFCO stands for the Association of American Feed Control Officials. This is the organization that developed the standards the industry uses to determine what constitutes "complete and balanced" nutrition for dogs (and other animals). Every pet food label has a statement on it that references AAFCO. The statement tells you whether the food is meant for "intermittent and supplemental feeding only" – meaning it's *not* complete and balanced – or whether it provides complete and balanced nutrition.

The statement will also indicate whether the food has been formulated for "adult maintenance" only, or whether it can be fed to dogs in "all life stages," which includes puppies, pregnant or lactating mothers, and all adults.

If the AAFCO statement says the food is formulated to meet the nutritional levels for "growth," it has met the same standards as foods for "all life

stages." Foods that are formulated for puppies (growth or all life stages) contain higher levels of protein, fat, calcium, phosphorus, sodium, chloride, iron, copper, manganese, and zinc than foods that have been formulated for "adult maintenance" only.

ATTENTION, OWNERS OF LARGE-BREED PUPPIES

The maximum level of calcium for large- and giant-breed puppies is lower than maximum amount allowed for small-breed puppies and adult dogs. Too much calcium can cause bone and joint abnormalities in large-breed puppies (defined by AAFCO as those who are likely to mature at more than 70 pounds).

In 2016, in acknowledgment of the need for reduced calcium for large-breed puppies, AAFCO began requiring food makers to specify whether their foods (formulated for growth or all life stages) meet these new requirements for large-breed puppies.

If the AAFCO statement says the food is for growth/all life stages "**including** growth of large-size dogs (70 pounds or more as an adult)," it is safe to feed to large breed pups.

If the statement says the food is for growth/all life stages "**except for** growth of large-size dogs (70 pounds or more as an adult)," it should **not** be fed to large-breed puppies.

To be safe, if you have a large-breed puppy, or a mixed-breed pup who looks like he may grow to more than 50 or 60 pounds, you should choose foods with the "including growth of large-size dogs" statement. Smaller-breed puppies can be safely fed foods with either statement.



This empty bag holds 22 pounds of dry food; it's a big bag! Its nutritional adequacy statement is printed on the side. We've circled it in red and taped a dime next to it. (It's very small!)



How to Shop the Labels

It's easy! Follow some common-sense guidelines to identify the best-quality foods at any price point.



Your dog is counting on you to make good choices! Take your time making comparisons.

Alrigh! You're in the pet supply store, armed with information about what you have been feeding your dog. You know which nutritional adequacy (AAFCO) statement to look for, you know how much protein and fat should be in the guaranteed analysis of the foods you are going to consider, and, presumably, you know how much you are willing to spend. Put on your reading glasses or get out your cell phone (so you can use the camera's zoom): It's time to read ingredient labels.

NOT SHOPPING FOR YOU

Let's be clear: You are not looking for something that sounds yummy to eat. Products that contain 20 different food items that you might find in your kitchen (or Martha Stewart's kitchen, say) cannot possibly contain enough of any of those ingredients to do your dog any good. This sort of ingredient list is meant to appeal to *your* appetite.

Ingredients are listed according to their weight before the food was processed. By the time you get past the sixth or seventh ingredi-

ent on a label, the amount of that ingredient in the food is pretty small, so we're neither going to get too excited nor too upset about the appearance of one or two particularly healthful or egregious ingredients in eighth place or below.

Note that food-type ingredients (fruits, vegetables, fats, grains, etc.) that appear after or between any added salt or vitamins or minerals are present in the product in inconsequential amounts. No *foods* are particularly beneficial in these minuscule amounts.

In contrast, potent herbs or supplements, such as turmeric or DHA, may be beneficial in tiny amounts. But the more of these things that appear on the ingredients list, the smaller their amounts are by necessity – and we're right back to the suspicion that the ingredients list has been built to appeal to *you* rather than benefit your dog.

HALLMARKS OF QUALITY

Here are the things that you *want to see* on an ingredients list:

■ **Lots of named animal protein at the top of the ingredients list.** "Named" means the species is identified: chicken, beef, lamb, etc. Unnamed animal sources include "meat" and "poultry."

When a named meat is first on the ingredient list, there should be a named animal-meal (i.e., chicken meal, lamb meal) immediately or closely following the meat. Meat meals are made by rendering – essentially boiling down, dehydrating, and grinding the animal tissues into a granular, powdery high-protein meal.

Fresh meat contains a lot of moisture (which is heavy), so if meat is first on the list, it acts like a diluted protein source; while it adds an appealing flavor and aroma to the food, it doesn't actually contribute adequate protein to the diet. That's why another named source of *animal* protein should appear in the top two or three ingredients.

Grain or Grain-Free?

Grain-free diets are *great* – for dogs who are allergic to or have trouble digesting grain. But we've long been worried over the growing list of foods that are used as grain replacements in these products; compared to grains, most of them have a short history of use in pet food. And, given the concerns about a possible link between dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) and diets with high amounts of peas, chickpeas, and other legumes often used as replacements for grain, we're even less inclined to recommend grain-free products for dogs who don't *need* them.

That said, it shouldn't hurt to use a grain-free diet as one of several foods you feed in rotation with conventional diets. See "Rotation, Rotation, Rotation" on page 8 for information about rotating foods.

One note: Peas and other legumes have been appearing more frequently and in greater amounts in dog foods that contain grain, too, and we find this concerning. For information about canine dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) and possible links to diet, please read "Diet, Dogs, and DCM" in the November 2019 issue.

Understanding the “Guaranteed Analysis” (GA)”

The guaranteed analysis (GA) is a highly regulated part of a pet food label, and the facts printed there are subject to surveillance and enforcement. State feed control officials may sample and test the product at any point in its production and sale; they often do visit stores and pull product from the shelf to test.

By federal law, the GA section of a pet food label must include four things: the minimum amounts of crude protein and crude fat and the maximum amounts of crude fiber and moisture in the food.

By the way, don't be alarmed by the use of the word “crude” in the terms you will see in the GA (“crude protein,” “crude fat,” and “crude fiber”). In this case “crude” refers to the testing methods used to determine the amounts, not the nutrients themselves. The tests return a close approximation of the actual amount. It's a subtle difference, and not terribly significant, so we use the terms without the crude prefix, as it were.

The four macronutrients that you will always find in the GA are there because they are considered important indicators of the food's total value, with actual economic implications. **Protein and fat** are the most important (and most expensive) macronutrients for dogs, so both are expressed in *minimum* amounts; what's being guaranteed is that the foods contain *at least* those amounts.

Be aware that the food may (and probably does) contain at least a little more protein and/or fat than the minimums listed in the GA. If you need to strictly limit your dog's fat or protein, ask the manufacturer for a *typical* nutrient analysis – the result of a recent test of the varieties of food you are considering. Any pet food company who can't or won't produce this data probably shouldn't be in the pet food business.

Carbs are not listed in the GA because they are not important to canine nutrition. Were you aware that dogs have zero nutritional requirements for carbohydrates? It's true. Dogs can live and thrive on a diet that contains only protein and fat, with zero carbs. That said, dry foods do contain carbs; it's impossible to make a kibble without carb sources. But you won't find the actual percentage of the food that is carbohydrate on the GA.

Fiber and moisture are the other items in the GA. These are expressed in terms of their *maximum* presence in the food; you don't want too much of either one! Most dry dog foods contain a maximum of 10% to 12% moisture. Any more moisture than that, and the kibble may

| GUARANTEED ANALYSIS | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Crude Protein (min)..... | 23.00% |
| Crude Fat (min)..... | 13.00% |
| Crude Fiber (max)..... | 4.00% |
| Moisture (max)..... | 10.00% |
| Vitamin E (min)..... | 125 IU/KG |
| Ascorbic Acid* (min)..... | 25 MG/KG |
| Omega-6 Fatty Acid* (min)..... | 2.49% |
| Omega-3 Fatty Acid* (min)..... | 0.78% |

*Not recognized as an essential nutrient by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles.

Here's a GA panel from a typical, decent-quality dry dog food formulated for dogs of all life stages. The AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles call for a minimum of 20.25% protein as fed (as it appears on the label) for growth/dogs of all life stages; at 23%, this food contains only a little more than that. The minimum amount of fat for growth/all life stages is 7.65% as fed; this food has a good bit more than the minimum, but would not be considered a high-fat food. Note: Including extra nutrients on the GA is not required, but a good way for a pet food maker to substantiate the potential for benefit from inclusion at a guaranteed amount.

experience bacterial growth. Less moisture and it won't be very palatable.

The fiber content of dry dog foods tends to be more variable, which is interesting, because the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles contain neither a minimum nor a maximum level; they don't address fiber at all.

Most dry dog foods contain between 2.5% and 4.5%, although some “weight loss” or “lite” formulas might contain as much as 10% fiber. High fiber levels can interfere with the absorption of other nutrients in the food; diets with particularly low levels of fiber may contribute to the development of diarrhea, constipation, and/or problems with the dog's anal glands. If your dog experiences any of these issues involving elimination, start paying attention to the amount of fiber in his diet. Consider a food with a higher amount of fiber than what you currently feed; if matters improve but he's still not producing a nice firm (but not too hard) stool, look for a diet with an even higher fiber content, and, of course, discuss the issue with your veterinarian.

Manufacturers may (but are not required to) include other nutrients in the GA. The inclusion of a nutrient in the GA is a legal guarantee that the nutrient is present in those amounts in the food, and this is subject to testing and enforcement by state feed control officials. It's a good way for pet food makers to validate claims of significantly increased amounts of certain nutrients, such as DHA (increased levels have neural benefits for puppies) or glycosaminoglycans (e.g., chondroitin, which has been shown to reduce arthritis symptoms).

Rotation, Rotation, Rotation: Choose Several Foods

You may have not noticed, but we've been using the words "foods" and "products" in the text above. We strongly encourage owners to rotate among at least three different products from different pet food companies throughout the year. And more may be better! Here's why:

Most pet food companies use the same vitamin/mineral premix for all their dry dog foods – but the nutrient levels in the premix used by one company will undoubtedly be different than those in the premix used by other companies. If you feed only one food, or even several products from just one company, you are *entrenching* those nutrient levels in your dog's body.

Many people (and even many veterinarians) believe that all foods that are labeled as "complete and balanced" contain approximately the same amounts and levels of nutrients. This presumes that pet food makers are all working to meet some sort of "recommended daily allowance (RDA)" of nutrients required by dogs – not so!

The RDA nutrient levels for humans were developed by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council/National Academy of Sciences. Vitamin, mineral, and macronutrient (fat, protein, carbohydrate) levels are expressed on our food packages as providing some percentage of the total amount of various nutrients that we need daily. But this isn't how nutrient levels in pet foods are expressed.

AAFCO establishes the nutrient levels that legally constitute "complete and balanced" diets for our pets, and publishes the requirements for canine diets in a table – the "AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles." AAFCO makes adjustments to the nutrient levels in the tables as continuing studies in animal nutrition are conducted.

But, unlike the human RDAs with target levels of nutrients, the Dog Food Nutrient Profiles consist only of minimum values for all the nutrients required by dogs and maximum values for just a few nutrients. As long as a food meets the minimum nutrient values expressed in the profiles, and doesn't exceed the maximum values, it can be labeled as "complete and balanced." Let's say it another way: The foods on your pet store shelves may actually contain wildly varying levels of vitamins, minerals, and macronutrients, and yet all can call themselves "complete and balanced."

This is why we have always advised owners not to settle on just one product and feed it to their dogs for months or (heaven forbid) years. It may develop that the particular product you have chosen – the one that seems to suit your dog so well – turns out to have copper levels that are way too high for your dog or selenium levels that are so low as to leave your dog dangerously deficient after years of eating nothing but that one diet. Your goal should be finding at least a *few* good dog foods from different brands to rotate among.

■ **When vegetables, fruits, grains, potatoes, or legumes are used, they should be whole** (as opposed to highly processed fractions that are likely a waste product from the human food industry, such as tomato pomace, brewer's rice, and soybean mill run).

■ **Bonus points for products that are made with ingredients that are certified as organic, humanely raised, or sustainably farmed.** We understand that it's good marketing, but we also like to buy from companies who support shelters or rescues, manufacture in "green" plants, and participate in recycling and waste reduction programs.

DISQUALIFIERS

Here are some things to avoid – undesirable attributes that indicate a lower-quality food:

■ **Unnamed animal protein sources.** "Meat," "meat and bone meal," and "poultry" are examples of protein sources to avoid.

■ **Meat by-products, poultry by-products, meat by-product meal, and poultry by-product meal.** These ingredients are often handled with far less care than more expensive animal protein sources (i.e., without refrigeration and with less sanitation).

■ **"Generic" fat sources.** "Animal fat" can be any mixed fat of animal origin. "Poultry" fat is not as suspect as "animal fat," but "chicken fat" or "duck fat" is better (and traceable).

■ **Novel ingredients.** Having access to foods with uncommon ingredients (such as alligator, kangaroo, quail, rabbit, etc., as well as carbohydrate sources like quinoa and amaranth) can be a lifesaver when your dog has multiple proven allergies to common foods and you need to find a diet that contains ingredients he's never had before.

If you feed these foods to a dog who does *not* have allergies and he develops allergies later, you will have

a diminished pool of candidate novel diets to feed him. Also, less is known about ingredients with short histories of use in pet food. Save these foods until you really need them.

■ **“Ingredient splitting,”** whereby two or more very similar food “fractions” appear on the ingredients list. Because the ingredients are listed in descending order of their weight, a manufacturer can make it appear that a high-quality ingredient is represented in the food in a greater amount than it really is.

This is accomplished by using several fractions or versions of an ingredient as separate ingredients (i.e., rice, brewer’s rice, rice bran, rice protein meal). If all the iterations of that ingredient were combined or reconstituted, they would outweigh the higher-quality ingredient, pushing the better-quality ingredient down on the ingredients list.

■ **We don’t recommend foods that use animal plasma or blood meal as a protein source.** The traceability of the product concerns us.

■ **Added sweeteners.** Sweeteners are used to increase the palatability of foods; they should not be needed to attract a dog to a diet that contains quality animal protein and fat sources and that has been properly cooked and preserved.

■ **Artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives (such as BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin).** Chemical coloring agents are unnecessary; the color of the food doesn’t matter to your dog. Synthetic flavors should not be necessary in a quality food; healthy meats and fats will be enticing enough. Natural preservatives, such as mixed tocopherols, should be used instead of synthetic preservatives.

NOW GO SHOP

On the following pages, we’ve listed dozens of manufacturers who make good dog foods, including foods with grain and without; diets made with fresh meats only, meat meals only, or both; and moderately priced to expensive foods (super cheap foods don’t meet our selection criteria). These are just some of the brands that meet our approval; you may find more.

Keeping your dog’s individual needs in mind, try some new products, switch frequently – and always watch your dog! Note the date that you start feeding any new food on a calendar and record your dog’s physical responses to the switch, good and bad. If you pay attention, he’ll let you know what works for him (and what doesn’t) with his appetite, energy, skin and coat, stool, and weight. Just be ready to adjust his diet as needed. 🐾

ANALYZE THIS SAMPLE DOG FOOD INGREDIENTS PANEL

A fresh, whole, named meat in the first position increases the palatability of the food; a same-species meal immediately follows and props up the protein content – good!

Lamb meal and salmon meal also appear, probably to boost the protein content. This is likely needed because the food has more rice than chicken meal!

Note the appearance of “natural flavor” in the seventh position. Natural flavor typically refers to a condensed broth, but AAFCO doesn’t require pet food makers to disclose what’s in their proprietary flavoring agents. We’re not fans of this sort of mystery ingredient – and its appearance so high on the ingredients list means there is more of it than all of the ingredients below it, many of which sound more nutritious than “flavor.” So, hmm.

But then we have three iterations of rice in a row: whole brown rice, brewer’s rice, and rice bran – that’s classic ingredient splitting. If you were to combine the weight of all these rice ingredients, the rice might outweigh the chicken meal. The dog food maker must think the ingredients list would not look quite as appealing if it said,

INGREDIENTS

Chicken, Chicken Meal, Whole Brown Rice, Brewers Rice, Rice Bran, Lamb Meal, Natural Flavor, Salmon Meal, Chicken Fat (preserved with Mixed Tocopherols), Sunflower Oil (preserved with Mixed Tocopherols), Whole Grain Oatmeal, Whole Flaxseed, Dried Plain Beet Pulp, Potassium Chloride, Choline Chloride, DL-Methionine, **Salt,** Mixed Tocopherols and Citric Acid (preservatives), Whole Chia Seed, Dried Coconut, Dried Egg Product, Tomato Pomace, Dried Kale, Dried Pumpkin, Dried Spinach, Dried Blueberries, Dried Apples, Dried Carrots, Zinc Sulfate, Niacin Supplement, Biotin, Vitamin E Supplement, Iron Amino Acid Chelate, D-Calcium Pantothenate, Riboflavin Supplement (Vitamin B₂), Selenium Yeast, Vitamin B₁₂ Supplement, Copper Amino Acid Chelate, Pyridoxine Hydrochloride (Vitamin B₆), Manganese Amino Acid Chelate, Vitamin A Supplement, Thiamine Mononitrate (Vitamin B₁), Vitamin D₃ Supplement, Folic Acid, **Rosemary Extract.**

“Chicken, rice, chicken meal...” But at least it would be honest and accurate!

On the other hand, we have a named animal fat source (chicken fat) and it’s preserved with a natural preservative. Rosemary extract, the last ingredient, is another natural preservative and antioxidant.

See “salt” on the tenth line? Here’s where we really start to get irritated. Keep in mind that this food contains less of everything that follows salt. So while it sounds great that the food contains chia seeds, coconut, egg, tomato (pomace), kale, pumpkin, spinach, blueberries, apples, and carrots – and their inclusion means the pet food company is free to use pretty pictures or illustrations of these delicious-sounding foods on the front of the bag – there is less of each of them in the food than there is salt. How significant is their contribution to the food likely to be? Our guess? Little to none.

Final analysis? This is an okay food – certainly better than most grocery-store dog foods – and not containing anything harmful. We wouldn’t pay a premium-food price for it, though.

WHOLE DOG JOURNAL'S APPROVED DRY DOG FOODS FOR 2020

Products appear alphabetically by best-known name. In some cases this is the name of the company that makes the food; in others, it's the name of the food line. We have split some lines made by the same manufacturer into separate rows to better distinguish prices, # of varieties, etc.

| PRODUCT NAME Company Information | Average Price/lb. | # Varieties, # Grain-Free | Meat, Meal, or Both? | Range of Protein Content Range of Fat Content | Notes |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| ACANA Champion Petfoods, Auburn, KY (877) 939-0006; acana.com/usa Edmonton, AB (877) 939-0006; acana.com | US\$3.06 Can. \$3.19 | 18, 16 GF 20, 17 GF | Both Both | Min. 27% - 33% protein Min. 10% - 19% fat Min. 29% - 35% protein Min. 11% - 22% fat | Champion now has manufacturing plants in Canada and the U.S. and sells the products made in each location in their respective countries. Product offerings and formulations are slightly different in each country. Taurine added to Acana Singles. |
| ADDITION Kent, WA (425) 251-0330; addictionfoods.com | \$2.89 | 7, 6 GF | 5 meal, 1 meat, 1 veg | Min. 14% - 26% protein Min. 3.5% - 13% fat | Addiction makes its own foods in New Zealand. Kangaroo variety contains dry meat. Company has added a vegetarian food to its lineup. |
| ANNAEAET Hatfield, PA (888) 723-0367; annaet.com | \$2.74 | 14, 7 GF | 10 meal, 4 both | Min. 23% - 33% protein Min. 7% - 20% fat | Clean, no-nonsense formulas without legumes. All of Annaeet's foods contain a sustainable algae source of omega-3 fatty acids. |
| ARTEMIS FRESHMIX, OSOPURE La Habra, CA (800) 282-5876; artemiscompany.com | \$2.50 | 6, 3 GF | Both | Min. 20% - 28% protein Min. 6% - 17% fat | Osopure line is grain-free, and each variety contains a single animal protein source. Freshmix varieties contain several animal protein sources. |
| AVODERM Breeder's Choice, Walnut Creek, CA (866) 500-6286; avodermnatural.com | \$2.11 | 18, 10 GF | 11 meal, 7 both | Min. 20% - 30% protein Min. 8% - 16% fat | All Avoderm foods contain avocado and avocado oil. Revolving Menu grain-free line is formulated with similar nutrient levels for easy rotation. |
| AZMIRA Tucson, AZ (800) 497-5665; azmira.com | \$2.23 | 2 | Meal | Min. 22% protein Min. 8% fat | Azmira makes just two foods, a lamb and a turkey variety. Clean formulas, no legumes. |
| BENCH & FIELD Grand Rapids, MI (800) 525-4802; benchandfield.com | \$2.92 | 1 | Meal | Min. 24% protein Min. 15% fat | Bench and Field offers only one dry food, made with chicken meal. Food is sold in upscale grocery (Trader Joe's, Whole Foods) and direct-shipped (free shipping). |
| BLACKWOOD Lisbon, OH (888) 843-1738; blackwoodpetfood.com | \$1.67 | 13, 3 GF | Meal | Min. 20.5 - 28% protein Min. 9% - 18% fat | Blackwood is the "house brand" at Ohio Pet Foods, so they can make their products in small batches (for fresher food). "Sensitive Diet" line offers novel proteins. |
| BORÉAL Beamsville, ON (800) 253-8128; borealpetfood.com | \$2.61 | 12, 8 GF | 8 meal; 4 both | Min. 24% - 29% protein Min. 12% - 18% fat | Original line contains both meat and meals; Proper and Vital lines contain only meals. |
| CANIDAE Norco, CA (800) 398-1600; canidae.com | \$2.63 | 31, 26 GF | 19 both; 12 meal | Min. 20% - 34% protein Min. 8.5% - 19% fat | "Pure" line = limited ingredient, all GF, starts with fresh meat, follows with meal. Under the Sun line = single protein, GF, no potato. All Life Stages line = meal only. |
| CARNA4 Toronto, ON (855) 422-7624; carna4.com | \$8.40 | 3, 2 GF | Meat | Min. 29% protein Min. 15% fat | Carna4 uses fresh muscle meat, liver, eggs, and fish, whole produce, and certified organic sprouted seeds to make this baked food, and in small batches. |
| CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL Cos Cob, CT (800) 658-0624; chickensouppets.com | \$2.16 | 11, 4 GF | Both | Min. 23 - 30% protein Min. 12% - 18% fat | Ingredients lists for all formulas start with fresh meat, immediately followed by meat meals, then whole grains. |
| CLOUDSTAR WELLMADE St. Louis, MO (800) 361-9079; cloudstar.com | \$1.98 | 5 GF | Meal | Min. 24% - 26% protein Min. 8% - 15% fat | Baked foods; each is made with a single animal protein. Peas and lentils are main carb sources. |
| CORE Wellpet, Tewksbury, MA (800) 225-0904; wellnesspetfood.com | \$2.73 | 12 GF | Both | Min. 32% - 38% protein Min. 10% - 18% fat | Core Six is a limited-ingredient line, with legumes starting in 3rd spot. Core Raw Rev line contains meat nuggets. Most other Core foods have peas around 4th spot. Wellness has always added taurine to its foods. |
| DR. GARY'S BEST BREED Findlay, OH (800) 500-5999; bestbreed.com | \$1.89 | 16, 3 GF | Meal | Min. 21% - 32% protein Min. 7% - 22% fat | Dr. Gary's emphasis is balanced fats for healthy skin, coat, energy, and stamina. Grain-free foods use peas and legumes. |

| PRODUCT NAME Company Information | Average Price/lb. | # Varieties, # Grain-Free | Meat, Meal, or Both? | Range of Protein Content Range of Fat Content | Notes |
|---|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| DR. TIM'S PET FOOD Marquette, MI (906) 249-8486; drtims.com | \$2.43 | 11, 3 GF | 8 meal, 3 both | Min. 26% - 35% protein Min. 10% - 25% fat | Dr. Tim's uses low-ash meat meals. Grain-free foods use peas. Note: Some varieties contain porcine plasma or porcine blood meal (we don't approve of). |
| EAGLE PACK Wellpet, Tewksbury, MA (800) 225-0904; eaglepack.com | \$1.69 | 9 | Meal | Min. 23% - 30% protein Min. 6% - 19% fat | Eagle Pack's foods are made with meat meals and whole grains. Guaranteed analyses include omega-3 and -6, calcium, phosphorus, and probiotic levels. |
| EARTHBORN HOLISTIC Midwestern Pet Foods, Evansville, IN (800) 474-4163; earthbornholisticpetfood.com | \$2.10 | 21, 15 GF | 16 meal, 4 both, 1 meat | Min. 22% - 38% protein Min. 7% - 20% fat | Venture grain-free line offers novel proteins (including squid!). Earthborn's "holistic" line uses meat meals and whole grains. |
| EVANGER'S Wheeling, IL (847) 537-0102; evangersdogfood.com | \$2.08 | 5, 3 GF | 3 meal, 2 both | Min. 24% - 33% protein Min. 6% - 15% fat | Varieties include pheasant & brown rice, whitefish & sweet potato. Evanger's dry fog foods are made by an independent contract manufacturer. |
| FARMINA N&D New York NY (888) 292-9965; farmina.com/us | \$3.54 | 40, 26 GF | Meat | Min. 23% - 35% protein Min. 8% - 20% fat | All the Farmina lines (N&D Grain-Free, Quinoa Functional, Pumpkin Grain-Free, and Ancestral Grain lines) contain fresh and dehydrated meats (no meals). |
| FIRSTMATE, KASIKS, SKOKI FirstMate, North Vancouver, BC (800) 658-1166; firstmate.com | \$2.46 | 17, 12 GF | Meal | Min. 18% - 32% protein Min. 8% - 20% fat | FirstMate makes its own foods in British Columbia. FirstMate and Kasiks = single animal-protein source. Skoki is FirstMate's economy line. |
| FROMM Mequon, WI (800) 325-6331; frommfamily.com | \$2.23 | 31, 13 GF | Both | Min. 21% - 30% protein Min. 10% - 18% fat | This family-owned company makes its own foods in its own plants. Fromm has three lines: Four-Star Nutritional, Gold, and Classic (economy line). |
| GATHER Petcarean, Chilliwack, BC (866) 864-6112; petcarean.com | \$4.75 | 3, 2 GF, 1 vegan | 2 both, 1 none | Min. 22% - 30% protein Min. 11% - 15% fat | Gather comes in one vegan variety. The other two are made with certified free-run and/or wild-caught animal protein sources. |
| GO! Petcarean, Chilliwack, BC (866) 864-6112; petcarean.com | \$2.74 | 16, 12 GF | Both | Min. 22% - 36% protein Min. 12% - 18% fat | Go! has been rebranded as Petcarean's "solutions" foods for skin and coat, "hip and joint support," and food sensitivities (limited ingredients.) |
| GRANDMA MAE'S New York, NY (888) 653-8021; grandmamaes.com | \$2.85 | 17, 10 GF | 12 meal; 5 both | Min. 23% - 32% protein Min. 7% - 16% fat | Many of these have a single animal protein source and no peas. Food is made for a collective of independent pet supply stores and sold only in those stores. |
| HALO Tampa, FL (800) 426-4256; halopets.com | \$3.68 | 14, 7 GF | 13 meat, 1 vegan | Min. 20% - 28% protein Min. 10% - 18% fat | Halo use only meat (no meals). Uses only meats that are GAP 3-certified (comprehensive welfare and care standards) and MSC-certified fish. Lots of legumes. |
| HEALTH EXTENSION Deer Park, NY (800) 992-9738; healthextension.com | \$2.05 | 11, 5 GF | Both | Min. 24% - 27% protein Min. 9% - 18% fat | Made in small batches, uses non-GMO produce. Grain-free foods use chickpeas and other legumes. Company is family-owned and operated. |
| HOLISTIC SELECT Wellpet, Tewksbury, MA (800) 225-0904; holisticselect.com | \$2.70 | 16, 11 GF | 15 meal; 1 both | Min. 24% - 35% protein Min. 8% - 18% fat | Company regards digestive health and support as foremost in importance, and adds probiotics and digestive enzymes. Made in company's own mfg. plant. |
| INSTINCT Nature's Variety, St. Louis, MO (888) 519-7387; instinctpetfood.com | \$3.10 | 31, 26 GF | All both | Min. 23.5% - 37.5% protein Min. 11% - 24% fat | Original foods coated w/ freeze-dried meat; these & Limited Ingredient foods use peas. Raw Boost contains freeze-dried meat nuggets. Be Natural foods contain grain. |
| LIFE'S ABUNDANCE Jupiter, FL (877) 387-4564; lifesabundance.com | \$3.31 | 5, 1 GF | Meal | Min. 25% - 30% protein Min. 11.5% - 19% fat | Buy food from a local rep (or become a rep!) or have it autoshipped. (Prices used for average are autoship prices.) |
| LIFESPAN Petguard, Sewickly, PA (929) 515-1436; petguard.com | \$2.11 | 1 | Both | Min. 26% protein Min. 13% fat | Fresh chicken, chicken meal, whole brown rice, oatmeal, chicken fat; lentils appear 6th... This is how nice foods were made before the grain-free craze. |
| LOTUS Lotus Natural Food, Torrance, CA (888) 995-6887; lotuspetfoods.com | \$4.07 | 14, 8 GF | 8 meat; 5 both; 1 meal | Min. 18% - 30% protein Min. 9% - 16% fat | Lotus foods are baked, not extruded. Peas are used in most formulas. Grain-free varieties cost more (\$4.68/lb); life stage foods (puppy, adult, senior) \$3.25/lb. |

| PRODUCT NAME Company Information | Average Price/lb. | # Varieties, # Grain-Free | Meat, Meal, or Both? | Range of Protein Content Range of Fat Content | Notes |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| MERRICK A div. of Nestlé Purina, Amarillo, TX (800) 664-7387; merrickpetcare.com | \$3.07 | 42, 38 GF | Both | Min. 25% - 38% protein Min. 8% - 17% fat | Only five varieties ("Classic" line) contain grain. First ingredient is always meat. Backcountry line mixes in freeze-dried nuggets. All made in Merrick's own plant. |
| NATURAL BALANCE A div. of J.M. Smuckers, Burbank, CA (800) 829-4493; naturalbalanceinc.com | \$2.39 | 29, 20 GF | 25 both, 1 meal, 2 meat, 1 veg | Min. 20% - 32% protein Min. 7.5% - 16% fat | Super-high-protein, limited ingredient, reduced calorie, (and one vegetarian) products available. Company makes test results of each batch available online. |
| NATURAL PLANET NutriSource; Perham, MN (800) 525-9155; naturalplanetpetfood.com | \$2.79 | 5, 4 GF | Both | Min. 23% - 25% protein Min. 14% - 15% fat | Made with free-range organic chicken and some other organic ingredients. Peas and chickpeas in use. |
| NEWMAN'S OWN Westport, CT (203) 222-0136; newmansown.com | \$2.00 | 1 | Both | Min. 21% protein Min. 12% fat | Fresh chicken 1st on the ingredients; peas are 4th, chicken meal appears 5th. Many organic ingredients included. |
| NOW FRESH Petcurean, Chilliwack, BC (866) 864-6112; petcurean.com | \$3.24 | 13 GF | Meat | Min. 24% - 29% protein Min. 10% - 18% fat | Only fresh meats are used in these life-stage formulas (puppies, adults, seniors; also small and large-breed foods). Peas appear 3rd or 4th on almost all foods. |
| NULO Austin, TX (512) 476-6856; nulo.com | \$3.08 | 34, 23 GF | Both | Min. 27% - 35% protein Min. 7% - 18% fat | Medal Series (sold at Petsmart) and Freestyle (through independent retailers and online) have legumes. Challenger & Front Runner lines have no legumes. |
| NUTRISOURCE Perham, MN; (800) 525-9155; nutrsourcepetfoods.com | \$2.04 | 33, 17 GF | 29 both, 4 meal | Min. 22% - 32% protein Min. 8% - 21% fat | NutriSource offers many animal protein combinations in grain-containing and grain-free varieties; grain-free foods contain legumes. |
| NUTRAM Elmira, ON; (844) 234-2464; nutram.com | \$2.82 | 15, 6 GF | Both | Min. 22% - 36% protein Min. 9% - 17% fat | Not yet widely available in the U.S. Nutram states optimum absorption is its goal. Legumes appear consistently in 4th, 5th, and 6th positions. |
| NUTRIENCE Rolf C. Hagen, Baie d'Urfé, QC (888) 600-4369; nutrience.ca Malone, NY; nutrienceusa.com | Can \$2.87 U.S. \$3.37 | 30, 19 GF | 25 both, 5 meal | Min. 25% - 38% protein Min. 14% - 18% fat | Made in Canada. Only grain-free line is sold in the U.S. Subzero line contains nuggets of freeze-dried meat. Infusion is infused with freeze-dried chicken liver. Legumes appear, but low (10th and lower). |
| OPEN FARM Toronto, ON (833) 399-3403; openfarmpet.com | \$3.31 | 12, 8 GF | Both | Min. 26% - 32% protein Min. 12.5 - 16% fat | Food-source animals are third-party certified humanely raised, grass-fed/free-range; all fish is wild-caught. Lots of legumes, except for new "Ancient Grains" line. |
| ORGANIX Castor & Pollux, Amarillo, TX (800) 875-7518; castorpolluxpet.com | \$4.52 | 6, 4 GF | Both | Min. 25% - 26% protein Min. 13.5% - 16% fat | Organix foods are certified USDA Organic (>95% or more organic). Each food has fresh meat 1st and meat meal 2nd; legumes appear 4th, 5th, and 7th in most. |
| ORIJEN Champion Petfoods, Auburn, KY (877) 939-0006; orijen.ca/us Edmonton, AB; (877) 939-0006; orijen.ca | U.S. \$4.05 Can. \$3.96 | 8 GF | Meat | Min. 38% - 42% protein Min. 13% - 20% fat | Canada-made foods sold in Canada and internationally, U.S.-made foods sold in U.S. Foods have been reformulated; they contain several legumes (sometimes as many as 7), but low (like 17th and lower on the list). |
| PET CHEF EXPRESS New Westminster, BC (604) 916-2433; petchefexpress.ca | \$1.96 | 1 | Meal | Min. 25% protein Min. 10% fat | Company offers home delivery in BC and retail sales in BC and ON. |
| PINNACLE Central Garden & Pet, Walnut Creek, CA (866) 500-6286; pinnaclepet.com | \$2.77 | 7 GF | Both | Min. 25% - 29% protein Min. 10% - 15% fat | Most varieties start with fresh meat and have a meat meal second (but peas and other legumes immediately follow). Sold only in independent pet supply stores. |
| PRISTINE Castor & Pollux, Amarillo, TX (800) 875-7518; castorpolluxpet.com | \$4.28 | 9 GF | Both | Min. 28% - 34% protein Min. 14% - 16% fat | Foods have fresh meat 1st and meat meal 2nd (but several legumes follow). Uses wild-caught fish, grass-fed and/or free-range animals, and organic ingredients. |
| PROFESSIONAL+ Diamond Pet Foods, Meta, MO (800) 977-8797; professionalpetfood.com | \$1.07 | 4 GF | Both | Min. 23% - 26% protein Min. 10% - 15% fat | All varieties start with meat and meat meal, then legumes and other grain-free carbs. |

| PRODUCT NAME Company Information | Average Price/lb. | # Varieties, # Grain-Free | Meat, Meal, or Both? | Range of Protein Content Range of Fat Content | Notes |
|---|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|---|
| PURE VITA NutriSource, Perham, MN (800) 525-9155; purevitapetfoods.com | \$2.90 | 13, 9 GF | Both | Min. 24% - 28% protein Min. 13% - 16% fat | Each PureVita food contains a single source of animal protein. Peas appear around 5th or 6th place in foods with grain, around 3rd place in grain-free foods. |
| SIMPLE Wellpet, Tewksbury, MA (800) 225-0904; wellnesspetfood.com | \$2.54 | 6, 4 GF | 5 both, 1 meat | Min. 21% - 29% protein Min. 8% - 14% fat | Simple is a limited-ingredient line. Peas and potatoes appear consistently at 3rd or 4th spot, even in 2 varieties with grain. |
| SPORT DOG FOOD West Hampton Beach, NY (631) 684-9900; sportdogfood.com | \$2.30 | 11, 3 GF | Meal | Min. 26% - 30% protein Min. 14% - 22% fat | Baked foods. No peas! Coated with "proprietary blend of salmon oil, herring oil, probiotics and freeze-dried proteins..." Direct shipping available. |
| STELLA AND CHEWY'S Oak Creek, WI (888) 477-8977 X; stellaandchewys.com | \$4.12 | 26, 19 GF | Both | Min. 24% - 36% protein Min. 13.5% - 17% fat | Now offering legume, legume-free, grain, grain-free, baked, & extruded foods. Some are coated with freeze-dried meat, some have freeze-dried nuggets mixed in. |
| SUMMIT Petcurean, Abbotsford, Canada (866) 864-6112; petcurean.com | Can \$1.81 | 4 | Meal | Min. 21% - 28% protein Min. 8% - 17% fat | Summit line is made with meat meals and sold only in Canada. Only the "reduced calorie" variety contains peas (7th). |
| TASTE OF THE WILD Diamond; Meta, MO; (800) 442-0402 tasteofthewildpetfood.com | \$1.76 | 13, 10 GF | Both | Min. 25% - 32% protein Min. 15% - 18% fat | Most have meat 1st and meat meal 2nd but peas or lentils 3rd. Grain-containing varieties are peas-free. |
| TENDER AND TRUE Omaha, NE (877) 616-4455; tenderandtruepet.com | \$2.94 | 6, 4 GF | Both | Min. 26% - 30% protein Min. 16% - 17% fat | All foods are USDA Organic and all animal ingredients are certified as humanely raised or sustainable seafood. Legumes appear around 4th or 5th spot. |
| TIKI DOG Tiki Pets, Chesterfield, MO (866) 821-8562; tikipets.com | \$3.42 | 5 GF | Both | Min. 26.2% - 30% protein Min. 16% - 19% fat | Baked foods formulated for small dogs. Legumes appear 3rd, 5th, and 6th. Comes in a small kibble size and in small bags – the largest bag is 10 pounds. |
| TUSCAN NATURAL Pyramid Pet Products, Las Vegas, NV (888) 408-0895; tuscannatural.com | \$2.39 | 5, 3 GF | 3 both, 2 meat | Min. 24% - 35% protein Min. 12% - 20% fat | Simply Pure line is limited-ingredient, only one uses peas. Harvest line legumes 4th, 5th. Carne (grain-free) has a high meat inclusion, potatoes and peas 5th, 6th. |
| ULTRA HOLISTIC Nutro, Franklin, TN; (800) 833-5330 nutro.com/natural-dog-food/ultra | \$2.53 | 14, 4 GF | Both | Min. 23% - 30% protein Min. 10% - 16% fat | All contain chicken and some meat meals. Most grain-containing foods have legumes very low (10th or 12th). Grain-free line uses legumes 4th, 5th. |
| ULTRAMIX Castor & Pollux, Amarillo, TX (800) 875-7518; castorpolluxpet.com | \$3.19 | 3, 2 GF | Both | Min. 25% - 38% protein Min. 15% - 17% fat | All foods have fresh meat 1st and meat meal 2nd and contain many whole ingredients. Legumes used, but low (9th or 10th). |
| VERUS Abingdon, MD (888) 828-3787; veruspetfoods.com | \$3.10 | 8, 3 GF | 5 meal; 3 both | Min. 17% - 26% protein Min. 8% - 16% fat | Verus discloses ingredient sources, and uses cage-free chicken. Grain-containing foods are legume-free. Grain-free foods have legumes 4th, 5th. |
| WELLNESS COMPLETE HEALTH Wellpet, Tewksbury, MA (800) 225-0904; wellnesspetfood.com | \$2.57 | 20, 6 GF | Both | Min. 22% - 32% protein Min. 10% - 19% fat | Grain-free foods, and some of the grained ones, have high levels of potatoes and legumes, as high as 2nd on the list. Wellness has always added taurine to its foods. |
| WERUVA Natick, MA (800) 776-5262; weruva.com | \$4.15 | 3, 1 GF | Both | Min. 34% - 38% protein Min. 13% fat | Made in Canada. Grain-free variety has legumes 3rd-6th; legumes appear much lower (9th) in grained varieties. |
| WHOLE EARTH FARMS Merrick Pet Care, Amarillo, TX (800) 323-3353; feedgoodness.com | \$2.02 | 11, 7 GF | Both | Min. 24% - 27% protein Min. 8% - 15% fat | These foods all have meat meals 1st; whole meat sources appear, but low. Grained varieties use legumes around 6th spot; peas appear 3rd in grain-free foods. |
| ZIGNATURE Pets Global, Valencia, CA (888) 897-7207; zignature.com | \$2.56 | 18 GF | Both | Min. 26% - 32% protein Min. 14% - 18% fat | All limited-ingredient foods (10 contain a single animal protein species). None contain chicken, potatoes, or grain. Legumes appear 3rd, taurine is added to all. |



Dogs in the Workplace

What you (and your dog!) should know before you bring your dog to work.



If you don't have a private office with a door or baby gate you can use to contain your dog, you should have a crate, exercise pen, or tether ready for those times when your dog must be contained – especially when you are away from your desk. Make the spot super cozy, with a plush bed and some quiet toys (no squeakers!) or chews (but not the kind that smell bad!).

As the saying goes, “Life is better when I’m with my dog.” I can cite a long list of ways that he makes my days brighter – even my work days! From petting his soft fur or listening to his quiet snoring, to how he makes me laugh as he playfully brandishes his toys in hopes of a game of tug and getting me away from and computer every few hours for a walk around the block. See, I’m lucky. My dog Saber accompanies me to the office several days each week at the guide dog school where I oversee the puppy-raising program.

The Human Animal Bond Research Institute reports pets in the workplace can make employers more attractive to prospective employees, increase employee engagement and retention, improve relationships between employees and supervisors, and lower absenteeism. There’s also potential health benefits: stress management, a calming effect, and often an improvement in work-life balance.

It’s definitely nice to reach down and scratch my dog’s ears when I’m feeling overwhelmed with project deadlines. Stepping outside into the designated employee pet play yard helps ensure I don’t sit at my desk and work through lunch every day. Sometimes we spend my break walking around the block. Mostly, as an apartment dweller, I appreciate knowing he’s not stuck inside at home when I’m working long days. It’s a very nice job perk.

Despite the reported advantages, the Society for Human Resource Management reports less than 10 percent of U.S. employers welcome personal pets in the workplace on a regular basis.

While the benefits are notable, pets (for the purposes of this article, we’ll limit our thoughts to dogs, specifically) in the workplace can be tricky. Some office cultures might support an anything-goes

mentality where people don’t bat an eye at a rambunctious indoor dog park unfolding in the lobby. However, the attitude of “love me, love my dog” does not generally bode well for harmonious happenings during the daily grind. Bringing personal pets to the workplace, especially an office environment, is a privilege that might be more widely considered by employers if they felt it was less likely to be disruptive.

If you’re hoping to lobby for Fido to join you at work, or your company is considering implementing a pets-at-work policy, consider the following:

1 ESTABLISH BASIC HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES. It should go without saying workplace dogs should be disease- and parasite-free, clean and well-groomed, and appropriately vaccinated.

In the office, the priority should be

healthy workplace productivity. Ill-behaved dogs can be a nuisance almost anywhere, but the stakes are much higher when we're at work. To keep everyone safe, at a minimum, potential canine colleagues should be of sound temperament, well-socialized to people, and should not have a history of aggressive behavior or biting. Excessive barking, jumping up on people, getting into the trash, marking or repeated houstraining accidents, and inappropriate chewing are all behaviors that should not be tolerated in the workplace.

While the definition of "well-trained" will always be subjective, requiring office-candidate dogs to successfully pass the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen (CGC) test is one way to set a minimum behavior standard. Even better, ask employees to attain the mid-level Community Canine title, a similar, 10-part evaluation, but with elements performed in real-life settings such as busy sidewalks or local parks rather than a training facility.

Attaining these titles requires owners to invest time in training their dogs, and trained dogs are much more likely to be comfortable and behave appropriately in different settings. Plus, owners who participate in dog training programs are more likely to understand dog behavior and dog body language, and are therefore likely better equipped to prevent or address challenges that might arise when bringing their dogs to work.

Take Your Dog to Work Day

Established in 1999 by Pet Sitters International, Take Your Dog to Work Day celebrates the companionship of dogs, encourages adoption, and educates colleagues who don't have dogs about the joys of the human-animal bond – perhaps they'll adopt canine companions of their own!

Participating in this year's event, held nationwide on June 26, 2020, is a great way to introduce the idea of dogs in the workplace on a more regular basis. Pet Sitters International offers a free online toolkit that includes tips for promoting the idea to management, step-by-step planning instructions, a sample "dogs at work" policy, and even a customizable press release. This may well help generate positive media coverage about the organization's involvement in the celebration of our canine companions turned canine colleagues for the day! For more information, visit www.petsit.com.

2 MANAGEMENT MATTERS. It's always important to set dogs up for success. This is especially true when asking them to cohabitate with colleagues who might not be used to sharing their space with dogs. In our opinion, letting office dogs "free range" throughout the office is a recipe for trouble, as it's impossible to interrupt or redirect your dog's unwanted behavior when you have no idea where he is or what he's doing.

Employees with a private office can use a baby gate in the doorway to keep their dogs from cruising the halls without them. If the workplace set-up and dog's level of training allows, a crate, x-pen or chew-proof tether can be used when owners are unable to supervise the dog, or when the dog needs a little imposed downtime. Make sure the dog has a cozy bed, and use favorite chew items or food puzzles to encourage the dog to spend time on his bed. An office dog doesn't need to be on-the-go all the time. Dogs home alone spend much of their day quietly lounging; dogs at work can, too.

3 TAKE PROACTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR DOG. "Love me, love my dog" might fly when seeking a life-partner, but it's a selfish mentality when sharing workspace with others. If you're lucky enough to be granted permission to bring your dog to work, go the extra mile to make sure your dog is never a nuisance to others.

Respect colleagues' wishes to decline interaction. Some people are afraid of dogs. Some cultures view dogs as "dirty" animals that should strictly live outside. Some people live with varying degrees of dog-related allergies. And some people are just "cat people" or otherwise choose to be pet-free. Be sensitive and respectful to these differences. Personally, I like to aim for the standard of a well-trained service dog in a restaurant, that is, for most people to not even realize the dog is there, because it's quietly tucked at its handler's feet.

That's not to say office dogs should never be seen or heard, but in an age where fake service dogs are rampant and many dog owners feel entitled to regularly bring questionably or clearly untrained dogs into otherwise non-pet-friendly establishments, it's more important than ever for responsible dog owners to go the extra mile to show how welcoming dogs need not become problematic for others.

Keep your dog well-groomed to reduce shedding. Have lint rollers and hand sanitizer handy for any colleagues or visitors who

Dogs who are lucky enough to "work" at dog-related businesses may enjoy greater freedom in the office. At Three Dog Bakery's corporate headquarters, a special dog-containment "airlock" was installed so office dogs couldn't accidentally leave the building with an inattentive visitor.



might welcome interaction but are surprised by the “magical fibers of love” now clinging to their pants or who might want to clean their hands. Immediately address barking or rambunctious play, especially when colleagues are within earshot and on the phone, in a meeting, or on a deadline. If your dog is overly solicitous of attention from others, direct him to “go lie down,” so colleagues can work in peace (see “Useful Matters,” WDJ January 2020, for tips on teaching your dog to be happy on his mat.) In general, be considerate of others.

Give your dog ample opportunities to relieve in approved areas and clean up after him. Keep cleaning products on hand for unexpected accidents or moments of illness. Leave the toy with the 16 squeakers and the animal-product chew stick – the one that smells like warm death when soggy after a good chewing – at home.

And whatever you do, if your dog ever happens to counter-surf someone’s unattended lunch from their desk, immediately offer to replace it, no excuses! (Years ago, my first dog, a Whippet with a weakness for all things “carbs” might’ve given me an opportunity or two to practice this last tip.)

4 REMEMBER, IT’S AN OFFICE, NOT A DOG PARK. Many people enjoy

It goes without saying that dogs in offices with more than one canine colleague must be exquisitely comfortable

sharing their lives with multiple dogs, but when it comes to dogs in the workplace, there can easily be too much of a good thing. If you have more than one dog, consider rotating which dog accompanies you to the office each day. Even where I work, at a dog-related organization, where everyone’s workspace has been designed to safely manage dogs, and half of the dog-owning employees are trainers, staff are limited to bringing only two personal dogs to work each day.

5 ADVOCATE FOR YOUR DOG. Not all dogs are good candidates for the workplace, even if they aren’t outwardly aggressive. Shy or fearful dogs might prefer the stability of staying home versus the sometimes unpredictable nature of the workplace and its accompanying sense of “stranger danger.” If your dog gets car sick, he might not appreciate starting and ending each day in the car. If your dog is generally indifferent to oth-



Photo by Marjorie Bessing

er dogs, he might not enjoy sharing relatively close quarters with your cubicle-mate’s social butterfly of a Labrador.

It’s important to carefully consider your dog’s temperament and overall personality. Maybe he’s not right for the workplace at all. Or maybe it’s best to limit office visits to a couple of days each week.

Even if your dog is perfectly suited for life in the office, it’s still important to set some boundaries. If colleagues have the opportunity to interact with your dog, don’t be afraid to request that they follow certain rules. They might not care if your dog jumps on them, but if you care, insist they ask your dog to sit before petting. They might want to shower your dog with Scooby Snacks all throughout the day. If that doesn’t work for you, don’t be afraid to set some guidelines. Be nice about it, but it’s perfectly okay to ask that your ground rules be followed.

BE PROACTIVE

Welcoming dogs into the workplace can be a great way to boost employee morale, but it’s not without its challenges, and it’s not right for every organization. Careful planning and clear expectations can go a long way in setting up people – and their pets – for success when implementing a canine colleague policy. 🐾

Stephanie Colman is a writer and dog trainer in Southern California. She works for Guide Dogs of America in the puppy department, where she helps recruit and manage volunteer puppy raisers.

What About Allergy Issues?

Allergic reactions to dogs come from the body’s over-reaction to harmless proteins in the dog’s urine, saliva, or dander. If employee allergies are a concern, establishing dog-free zones, especially in common areas, can help. Consider providing in-room air purifiers or checking to see if building maintenance uses, or can add, a HEPA filter to the central air and heating unit. Frequent vacuuming and the use of anti-allergen sprays, along with surface dusting with a damp cloth versus dry dusting can help reduce allergen levels in the environment. There are also various sprays and pet wipes designed to help neutralize allergies.

If employees report mild allergies, the above efforts might lead to a workable arrangement where both the dog-owning and allergy-suffering employees can be made comfortable. If an employee suffers from severe, disabling allergies, by law, they must be accommodated. If that’s the case, it might be more realistic to find other ways for interested staff members to celebrate their shared love of dogs, such as monthly pet photo contests, or collecting donations for a local animal welfare organization.

READER SERVICE

Dogs in the Workplace Company Profile: On-Site LaserMedic

On-Site LaserMedic is a dog-friendly laser printer repair company in Chatsworth, California. Roxanna Sanchez, the organization’s chief operating officer, has been bringing her dogs to work for 15 years and is responsible for overseeing office-dog privileges for On-Site’s 23-person staff. Currently, four employees, including Sanchez, bring their dogs to work.

“The dogs brings happiness and a sense of calmness to the office,” Sanchez says. “Our customer service center can get bombarded with challenges throughout the day, and the dogs are good for the soul.”

Sanchez helps set up employees for success with their dogs in the office by reminding them to create an environment where the dog will be comfortable. This makes it less likely the employee will be distracted by a dog who is uncomfortable and acts out in order to get his needs met. Should an employee’s pet present a challenge, she’ll request that the dog take a break from the office; she’ll also refer the team to area trainers and is willing to reevaluate the dog at a later time. For some dogs, a little extra training makes all the difference. For others, including one of Sanchez’ own prior dogs, coming to the office just isn’t the right choice for the dog.

“I had a Rottweiler who came to the office with me all the time as a young puppy. She loved it,” says Sanchez. “But as she matured, she became suspicious of certain people and certain things, and I realized she wasn’t comfortable at work. I stopped bringing her.”

Throughout her 19-year history with On-Site, Sanchez has successfully introduced nine of her own pet dogs to the workplace, one or two at a time. She currently rotates between Myka, a 12-year-old Havanese; Bree, a 4-year-old, mid-sized mixed breed; and Ruuk, a 2-year-old, 10-pound mixed breed.

“We’re very fortunate to have a professional family atmosphere where our dogs are welcomed and appreciated,” she said. “So long as you set and hold employees to clear expectations, we’ve found dogs in the workplace to be a great asset to the organization.”

Myka, Sanchez’ calm, friendly Havanese, has been going to the office most of her life and is a positive example of dogs in the workplace.



Photo by Roxanna Sanchez

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CONSUMER
ALERT

Socially Conscious Sheltering

The evolution of a new model for animal shelter management and why you should want an SCS shelter in your community.

Shelters who adhere to the SCS tenets pledge to enhance the human-animal bond through safe placements and post-adoption support. As just one example: Families will not be sent home with a dog who is less than perfectly comfortable with children, and follow-up calls will be made to ensure that all parties are still getting along and happy a few weeks post-adoption.

One might imagine that the world of animal sheltering would be filled with people who care about animals and want to save lives – all hearts and flowers, a community united with a common purpose of saving animals and ensuring their quality of life. Would that it were so.

In fact, it's often the exact opposite, with warring camps of activists holding widely divergent opinions about how best to care for and rehome the dogs, cats, and other species who end up in animal shelters. The introduction and promotion of “no-kill shelters” in the early 1990s only heightened the level of acrimony among animal protection professionals and grassroots rescue groups alike, creating conflict and controversy that sometimes hinders efforts to save homeless animals.

In 2019, six women, several of whom were chief executive officers of animal shelters in

Colorado, got together to discuss their animal welfare beliefs, including shelter practices. All of them believe that our society is at a critical point in shaping the future of animal welfare. They agreed that while most people mean well in their attempts to change public policy around how we care for homeless pets, sometimes good intentions lead to unintended suffering for the very pets that people are trying to protect. And they sought to define and describe a modern model for socially conscious animal welfare.

Out of that conversation came the Socially Conscious Sheltering model, which they then shared with shelter CEOs from across the United States for their feedback. They sought input from shelters in different kinds of communities, with varying intake policies and levels of community engagement. The insight was incorporated into the fundamental goals of Socially Conscious Sheltering (SCS), and a website (scsheltering.org) was created. The SCS website describes SCS as “a framework that allows each of us to understand our role in creating best outcomes for pets. This concept is based on respectful treatment of animals. It's about placing every healthy and safe animal that ends up in a shelter or rescue. It's about transparency and leadership. It's about thoughtful public policy. It's about safe communities.”

As a long-time shelter supporter and former shelter manager myself, I am excited about the SCS model and hopeful that its guidance will improve outcomes for animal wards of shelters everywhere.

HOW WE GOT HERE

I have been observing – and participating in – the ever-evolving world of animal sheltering for the past 45 years. There are many things related to animal welfare that have gotten better – for both homeless animals and people who work in rescue and sheltering – and some things



that have gotten worse in that time. My tremendous excitement about the promise of the Socially Conscious Sheltering model has a lot to do with what I have witnessed in the recent history and evolution of the sheltering field.

In 1976, I began volunteering at the Marin Humane Society (MHS), a private non-profit shelter with a contract to perform animal control services for all of Marin County, California. A few months later, I accepted a position as a customer service representative – the first paid position of several that I accepted at MHS over the next 20 years.

For my last decade there, I was Director of Operations, responsible for keeping our statistics as well as directing our Field Services, Animal Care, and Customer Service departments, so I was acutely aware of the number of animals we took in at the shelter, their quality of life while in residence with us, and what ultimately happened to them (returned to owner, adopted, or euthanized).

At the beginning of my tenure at MHS, the shelter took in about 15,000 animals per year – strays, owner-surrender, neglect and abuse cases – none were ever turned away. Marin was (and is) a wealthy, well-educated community. We were well supported by our community and better situated than many shelters to provide excellent care for the animals who were brought through our doors. And even though this number was far better than many other shelters at that time (and is better than some shelters even today), we ultimately euthanized about 40% of them.

In the '80s and '90s, a number of societal and public policy changes helped progressively decrease the number of animals that found themselves in shelters and the number of animals who were euthanized there. Leash laws and licensing decreased the number of free-roaming pets. The animal welfare world amped up its spay/neuter education efforts nationwide, and many states passed laws requiring shelters to surgically neuter

all animals before they were adopted. Microchips increased the number of stray pets that could be returned to their owners.

By the time I left Marin to launch my Peaceable Paws dog training venture in 1996, MHS's intake numbers had dropped to fewer than 6,000, with a comparable decrease in our euthanasia numbers. Nationally, intake and euthanasia numbers had also decreased.

This is right around the time that the practices and policies of a high-profile animal shelter in the county next to Marin started a revolution in the animal sheltering field – a well-intentioned revolution, to be sure, but one with unfortunate antithetical consequences.

THE “NO-KILL” MOVEMENT

In the late 1980s, Richard Avanzino, the director of the San Francisco SPCA, began steering that organization away from the standard model of providing animal control services as well as sheltering and adoption services. Avanzino had been working to innovate solutions for improving the live release rates of the shelter, including building a network of foster providers, instituting a pit bull training and adoption program, paying owners of pit bulls to neuter their dogs, paying people to neuter stray and feral cats, and more. But he wanted to do even more to get the SF SPCA out of the job of euthanizing any animals, ever. He put the city on notice that his organization wouldn't renew its contracts for animal control by 1989, though it intended to continue to shelter and find homes for animals.

The city of San Francisco had to build a new city agency – the Department of Animal Care and Control – to take over animal control. In 1994, the SF SPCA announced that the organization was going to stop killing any “adoptable animals.” The SF SPCA was dubbed with the immediately popular appellation “no-kill shelter” and San Francisco was declared a “no-kill city.” It was a public relations home run near and far. From

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Ask your local animal shelter staff if the shelter adheres to Socially Conscious Sheltering guidelines. If they are unfamiliar with these tenets, give them a copy of this article, and/or direct them to the SCS website: SCSheltering.org.
- Find out which government agency awards the animal-control contract for your geographic area, and approach that agency, advocating for the adoption of the SCS tenets at your local shelter.
- Provide support and/or fundraising and volunteer time for your local SCS shelter. Ask them how you can help!
- Adopt from SCS shelters whenever possible, and encourage friends and family members to do so also!

the very beginning, the public loved the idea of no-kill shelters – without understanding the nuances built into the definition.

Most members of the public were *not* aware, however, that not all animals brought to a no-kill shelter would survive. No-kill was described by Avanzino and the rapidly increasing number of no-kill devotees as practices that preserved the lives of all “healthy and treatable” animals and euthanized only those whose problems were deemed “unhealthy and untreatable.”

An obvious problem lay in the ability of shelters to interpret “unhealthy and untreatable” quite variably. Avanzino promoted the use of the standards pet owners would use if the problems occurred in their own pets; most of us would consider kennel cough or a broken leg as “treatable,” for instance. But these terms were interpreted in very disparate ways by shelters of different means and levels of commitment to no-kill principles.

What people often fail to

understand (and what many shelters fail to communicate to their supporters) is that there are two types of shelters. “Open admission shelters” take in every animal brought to them; some are required to do so by virtue of contracts they have signed with a local government. In contrast, “limited admission shelters” may turn away animals that they know they will be unable to make available for adoption or that they do not have room for.

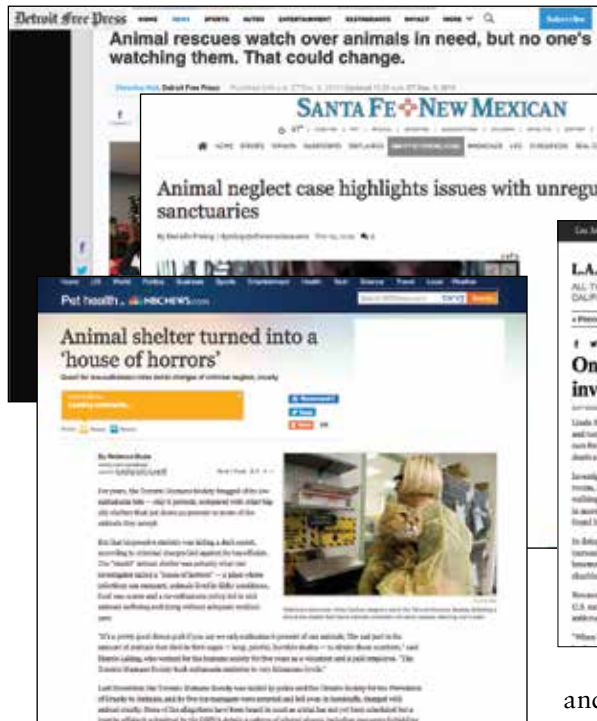
Many (perhaps most) limited-admission shelters were able to claim that they were no-kill, since they only rarely took in an animal that proved to be untreatable or unsafe to adopt. Far fewer open-admission shelters were able to make legitimate no-kill claims – and in the competition for donation dollars from animal lovers who didn’t want to give money to so-called “kill shelters,” this really hurt.

Shelters that could not or would not define themselves as no-kill were soon faced with hostility and a withdrawal of public support, causing many to try to meet the definition and make no-kill claims. Some open admission shelters could do so only through illegitimate means, such as warehousing an ever-increasing and untenable number of animals, wanton placement of animals to any other organizations (reputable and capable or not) that would take them, and adopting out animals with unsafe or borderline behavior issues.

Soon, all around the country, open-admission shelters began to bear an increased burden of accepting and caring for animals that no-kill shelters wouldn’t take – a costly burden, since caring for unhealthy animals requires greater resources. Simultaneously, these shelters began to feel the financial pinch as donation dollars were being diverted to no-kill organizations from former supporters.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

While the intention of the no-kill ethos is admirable, there have been some unfortunate consequences of the policies.



It's not hard to find headlines from across the nation that concern the increasing prevalence of "rescue hoarding" situations.

and often receive resounding rounds of applause from other

It’s been noted that more animals (especially dogs), previously recognized as behaviorally unsuitable for adoption, are being placed in the homes of adopters who are not adequately informed, experienced, or equipped to handle them safely. I have a thick file of news stories about dogs with bite histories who were adopted into homes where they later caused injuries and even fatalities.

Dog training and behavior professionals are in widespread and ever-growing agreement that we are seeing an increasing number of clients who are bringing us dogs who should never have been adopted to them in the first place. These are caring dog owners who had no idea what they were getting themselves into, sometimes because the shelter simply didn’t make a careful match in their eagerness to place the dog in a home, and sometimes because the shelter deliberately withheld information that would have helped the adopter realize this wasn’t the dog for them.

Twenty years ago, when I would express my opposition to the no-kill movement at seminars while speaking in support of *responsible* sheltering, I was often met with puzzled stares and sometimes open argument. Today I see a crowd full of nodding heads

who are encountering significant and dangerous challenges from client dogs adopted from organizations that are more concerned with their live release rate than with good, safe adoptions.

Additionally, a phenomenon that has required the creation of a new label – “rescue hoarding” – has risen to epidemic levels in the past decade. It’s a problem that can’t be traced precisely to no-kill’s door, but the perpetrators tend to be acquainted.

Once upon a time, if you heard about an animal hoarder, the person was usually a little old lady who lived in an apartment with 30-plus cats. Today, the vast majority of animal hoarding stories in the news involve rescue hoarders – people or groups who may have started out as legitimate rescuers, but who ended up completely overwhelmed with too many animals to care for and not enough resources to do so.

These are sometimes 501(c)3 non-profit rescue groups and shelters, sometimes individuals *pretending* to be 501(c)3 groups or shelters, and sometimes just individuals who hold strongly to the conviction that *any* life is better than no life. The common denominator is that many, or even most, have gotten their animals

from shelters that are handing off animals willy-nilly to almost anyone, in their efforts to call themselves no-kill. Dogs in these rescue hoarder situations are often badly malnourished, sick and dying, or already dead.

TIME FOR A NEW MODEL

The original architects of the SCS model were six women, all of whom were Presidents and CEOs of shelters or veterinary organizations in Colorado. They started a conversation about the need for a new guidance document for sheltering in January 2018, when they were all in attendance at a sheltering-related conference.

In March 2019, however, they all had a front-row seat to an event that provided the impetus to formalize their shared opinions and values regarding animal sheltering into what have become eight tenets of SCS.

It started with an inspection by the Department of Agriculture of an open-admission shelter in Pueblo, Colorado, which led to the resignation of the shelter director and ultimately, closure of the shelter. The first and subsequent inspections of the facility found numerous animals suffering with untreated injuries and illnesses, health records for the animals non-existent or in disarray, inadequate sanitation, treatment cabinets stocked with seriously out-of-date and unlabeled medications, intact animals of the opposite sex housed together, dogs who were being quarantined

in bite cases having opportunities to come into contact with front desk staff, and more.

All of the surviving animals at the shelter had to be transferred to other area shelters, including those run by the founders of SCS. When the Pueblo shelter closed, the organization that had been running the shelter, PAWS for Life, issued a statement that read in part, “There were significant hurdles in fulfilling the mission to be a no-kill, full-access public shelter to save lives that otherwise might have been lost under prior management.” (The irony of the suffering experienced by the animals who didn’t have timely access to veterinary care seemed to have been lost on the managers responsible.)

The founders of SCS released a group statement following the Pueblo shelter closure. It read, in part, “The suffering that happened at Community Animal Services of Pueblo, operated by PAWS for Life, is unacceptable. In an effort to adhere to a damaging local ordinance, it appears animals were allowed to suffer and die from their illnesses and injuries rather than being humanely euthanized. The animal welfare community’s priority is to ensure these animals are properly cared for and that they are protected from situations like this in the future....”

“This is a regretful example of how the no-kill movement, when taken to the extreme, preys upon compassion-

ate people’s desire to protect animals. Animals deserve respect, nurturing, support, and it is never acceptable to allow them to suffer. Our entire community is deeply saddened by this situation.”

On the SCS website, its founders admit that, in general, homeless animals in Colorado already enjoy “incredible” outcomes; the entire state enjoys an average 90% live release rate. But the founders wanted to address the fact that attempts to reach and maintain a *zero* kill status often lead to situations like the one in Pueblo, with under-funded shelters manned by over-burdened staff, leading to *increased* animal suffering.

The SCS founders released their tenets and published an explanatory website (SCSheltering.org) in March 2019. By following their suggested guidelines, the SCS founders say, shelters can achieve high live-release rates while also ensuring that no animal is allowed to suffer *and* the communities are kept safe from dangerous animals.

EIGHT TENETS OF SCS

Each of these tenets addresses common breakdowns where implementation of the no-kill model fails to adequately address the needs and welfare of *all* the animals in a given community or consider the safety of human caretakers, foster homes, and adopters. I applaud the remarkable steps this document takes toward repairing the significant flaws of no-kill. *My comments follow each tenet and appear in italics.*

1 Place every healthy and safe animal. Every single one. Healthy is defined as either having no signs of clinical disease or evidence of dis-

Just part of a group of more than 100 dogs seized following an investigation of a “small dog rescue” in Northern California. Many of the dogs were sick or had skin problems, all had internal and external parasites, and most were extremely thin. All had been obtained by the “rescue” from shelters and were advertised for “adoption” for fees of several hundred dollars or more.



Shelter managers should keep dogs like this in mind when they maintain a waiting list in order for people to surrender their pets. This dog was surrendered too late; she died of an infection before treatment could take effect.



ease that a veterinarian determines has a good or excellent prognosis for a comfortable life. Safe means that the animal has not exhibited behavior that is likely to result in severe injury or death to another animal or person.

This tenet maintains the original stated goal of no-kill to place all healthy, adoptable animals, but adds critically important definitions of the terms “healthy” and “safe” and emphasizes the importance of “safe.”

2 Ensure every unwanted or homeless pet has a safe place to go for shelter and care. An animal’s opportunity to be nurtured, healed, and rehomed should not depend on their age or condition – every community must have a shelter that accepts all animals brought to it. It is unacceptable to turn animals away because they are too old, sick, or broken.

This addresses an element totally overlooked by the no-kill model – and is one of my favorites. Communities must provide a safe place for all the homeless animals in their jurisdiction. In an attempt to prevent overcrowding, some shelters have begun to maintain waiting lists, some months-long, for people who want or need to surrender their animals. This sometimes results in animals being dumped and left to starve or be hit by cars as they attempt to fend for themselves – and this is simply unacceptable.

3 Assess the medical and behavioral needs of homeless animals and ensure these needs are thoughtfully addressed. Animals housed in shelters and rescues must be assessed for disease and injury and must have all medical conditions addressed so the animal does not suffer. These animals must also have their behavioral needs assessed and met, including enrichment sufficient to make them comfortable and to prevent self-destructive, obsessive-compulsive coping behaviors.

Addressing medical and behavioral needs of shelter animals in a timely manner should go without saying, but sadly, it doesn’t – as evidenced by the Pueblo experience. I wish that example was a rare anomaly, but unfortunately it is all too common.

4 Align shelter policy with the needs of the community. Does the community allow trap-neuter-return programs? If so, offer them. Will members of your community adopt animals with chronic disease, and are they willing to assume the time and expense of managing that disease? If so, with full disclosure, place them in these homes. Socially Conscious Shelters listen to their communities.

Every community is different. It’s a challenge for shelters to be able to meet the desires of the community and make ethical and humane choices for, and meet the needs of, the animals in their care.

5 Alleviate suffering and make appropriate euthanasia decisions. Compassionate euthanasia is a gift. It is not acceptable to let a terminally ill, suffering animal languish in a cage until it dies naturally when compassionate euthanasia can ease that endless pain. It is not acceptable to house a known dangerous animal who cannot be safely placed in the community for years until it goes crazy in a cage. Each euthanasia decision is difficult, and every decision must consider the welfare of the individual animal.

This tenet articulates what seems so obvious to many animal lovers: It’s our duty to alleviate animal suffering when and where we can. Compassionate euthanasia decisions are far too often blocked by those who believe that any life is better than no life. Sometimes, those standing in the way of these decisions are shelter volunteers and even Board members.

6 Enhance the human-animal bond through safe placements and post-adoption support. Integrating a living being into a new home can be difficult. As adoption agencies, Socially Conscious Shelters have a responsibility to support the new family. This can mean post-adoption behavior advice, classes for new pet caregivers, addressing shelter-related medical needs and being willing to accept the animal back if the pet and the family are not a good fit.

This also means *not* placing animals into homes that disrupt the human-animal bond by injuring children, other pets, and other people. There are many behavior issues that can be addressed through behavior modification and positive experiences. There are other behaviors that are dangerous and that cannot be mitigated.

This is another important point – one that is often missed by shelters that are focused solely on their live release rate. Some of the resources directed toward bringing in animals from other jurisdictions (and other countries) might be better spent providing support for the

animals already in the shelter's own community.

7 Consider the health and wellness of each animal and each community when transferring animals. Moving dogs and cats from communities that do not have homes available for them to communities where people are actively seeking pets saves lives.

However, bringing pets into a community is a responsibility. It is a responsibility to the animals already living in that community to not bring in infectious diseases that would make them sick. It is a responsibility to those living within the community to bring in animals that will live in harmony. And there is a responsibility to the community from which animals are being moved to impact that community's animal welfare struggles through humane education and spay and neuter programs.

There are documented cases of serious canine diseases being moved north from southern shelters and into the U.S. from other countries, as well as dogs from unsocialized or rural backgrounds suffering immense stress and never habituating to city life. Some transports are in violation of interstate laws that require veterinary checks and health certificates.

8 Foster a culture of transparency, ethical decision-making, mutual respect, continual learning, and collaboration. Socially Conscious Shelters are committed to full transparency. This can include reporting accurate statistics, sharing policies, and fully and quickly admitting when mistakes are made. Integrity must be the foundation of all decisions. Every shelter can learn something from every other shelter – it is important to be curious and to share innovative solutions to common problems. Only by working together

The responsibility for shelters to do everything in their power to make appropriate adoptions is great. The safety of the dogs, the adopting families, and even their neighbors is at stake.



can we ensure the best outcomes for all animals.

This is critical. How can we have a prayer of a chance of knowing how shelter programs are working and how the animals are faring if we aren't transparent?

SCS GATHERS MOMENTUM

Thanks to the leaders who innovated SCS, the animal sheltering community now has a model to look to that supports the placement of every adoptable animal, while at the same time recognizing that not every animal is adoptable.

The Eight Tenets of Socially Conscious Sheltering was released in March 2019, and the model was swiftly embraced by many other shelters in Colorado, as well as the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association. By August, shelters all over the country had also adopted Socially Conscious Sheltering, including shelters in Los Angeles, Davis County (UT), Santa Cruz County (CA), St. Louis (MO), Ventura County (CA), Berks County (PA), Nebraska, Cleveland (OH), Michigan, Jessamine County (KY), Loudoun County (VA), and dozens of other organizations.

Are the animal protection, sheltering, and rescue organizations in your area on board with Socially Conscious Sheltering? If you don't know, contact them and find out. If they are not, you can help them learn about it and help them understand why they should be. Encourage your animal loving friends to do the same. Educate and pressure your local government officials and organizational board members to get on board. We all want a better life for the animals in our world. You can help make it happen. 🐾

Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, of Fairplay, Maryland, is WDJ's Training Editor. Miller is also the author of many books on positive training. See page 24 for information on her classes for dog owners and trainers and book purchasing details.



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WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of many books on force-free, pain-free, fear-free training, including:

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