

DOG FOOD GRADING

Where does your dog food rank?

Making dog food comparisons has become almost a national pastime these days! The dog food recalls of have forced dog lovers everywhere to scrutinize their choice of dog food, and become obsessive 'label readers'.

In the uncertain world of dog food today, these kinds of dog food ratings are hugely valuable.



The consistency of the dog food analysis method makes it easy to apply to any dog food of your choice, and gives all puppy/dog owners a way to evaluate the diet they're already feeding, or plan to use.

There are so many different foods on the market, and so many differing opinions and rhetoric regarding the best ingredients, manufacturing processes etc. that choosing the best dog food for your pooch is definitely a challenge.

Premium dog food, holistic dog food, natural dog food, organic dog food... the list of varieties goes on and on... and on!

You can start by analyzing the dog food you're currently using, and then make dog food comparisons against any/all other brands that you want to. This method of determining the best dog food is based on allocating points for high quality dog food ingredients, and deducting points for inferior ingredients, fillers, chemicals, etc. The resulting 'score' for each dog food ranges from an 'A+' to an 'F'.

This method of grading dog food was developed by Great Dane owner and rescue volunteer, **Sarah Irick** and uses a very detailed points system to determine the overall value/quality of an individual dog food. She is a civil/industrial engineer, not a veterinarian or animal nutritionist by education or employment and does not work for any pet food manufacturer nor is affiliated with one. She does not officially support any one food. If you want to e-mail her with questions or comments, you can fredirick@hotmail.com. Please put "Dog Food Grading" in the subject line.

She has given permission to reprint her 'Dog Food Analysis and Grading' with the following:

This food grading system is specifically to help those who have trouble deciphering dog food labels and the many articles about what ingredients are.

If you have a quality dog food and are not looking to make a change, or if you know about reading dog food labels and can choose a dog food on your own, then by all means continue as you are.

However if you are looking for a quality food and would like some guidance on choosing between seemingly equal brands in the store, and you'd like more to base your information on than a friend or store clerk's recommendation, please feel free to use this handy guideline, but be aware that there may be other important information by breed type or size (i.e. in giant breed puppies you need a food with lower protein levels than is typically available in puppy foods, even "large breed" puppy foods), so you will need to research that as well).

Dog Food Analysis and Grading

To grade any dog food using Sarah Irick's dog food comparisons technique, start with the list of ingredients, usually found on the manufacturers website or use the one printed on the dog food bag.

Start with a grade of 100 points, then . . . :

1. For every listing of "by-product", **subtract 10 points**
2. For every non-specific animal source ("meat" or "poultry", meat, meal or fat) reference, **subtract 10 points**
3. If the food contains BHA, BHT, or ethoxyquin, **subtract 10 points**
4. For every grain "mill run" or non-specific grain source **subtract 5 points**.
If the same grain ingredient is used 2 or more times in the first five ingredients (i.e. "ground brown rice", "brewer's rice", "rice flour" are all the same grain), **subtract 5 more points**
5. If the protein sources are not meat meal and there are less than 2 meats in the top 3 ingredients, **subtract 3 points**
6. If it contains any artificial colorants, **subtract 3 points**
7. If it contains ground corn or whole grain corn, **subtract 3 points**
8. If corn is listed in the top 5 ingredients, **subtract 2 more points**
9. If the food contains any animal fat other than fish oil, **subtract 2 points**
10. If lamb is the only animal protein source (unless your dog is allergic to other protein sources), **subtract 2 points**
11. If it contains soy or soybeans, **subtract 2 points**
12. If it contains wheat (unless you know that your dog isn't allergic to wheat), **subtract 2 points**
13. If it contains beef (unless you know that your dog isn't allergic to beef), **subtract 1 point**
14. If it contains salt, **subtract 1 point**



Extra Credit:

- If any of the meat sources are organic, **add 5 points**
- If the food is endorsed by any major breed group or nutritionist, **add 5 points**
- If the food is baked not extruded, **add 5 points**
- If the food contains probiotics, **add 3 points**
- If the food contains fruit, **add 3 points**
- If the food contains vegetables (NOT corn or other grains), **add 3 points**
- If the animal sources are hormone-free and antibiotic-free, **add 2 points**
- If the food contains barley, **add 2 points**

- If the food contains flax seed oil (not just the seeds), **add 2 points**
- If the food contains oats or oatmeal, **add 1 point**
- If the food contains sunflower oil, **add 1 point**
- For every different specific animal protein source (other than the first one; count "chicken" and "chicken meal" as one source, but "chicken" and "fish" as 2 sources), **add 1 point**
- If it contains Glucosamine AND Chondroitin, **add 1 point**
- If the vegetables have been tested for pesticides and are pesticide-free, **add 1 point**

SCORING	
94-100+	= A
86-93	= B
78-85	= C
70-77	= D
<70	= F

Glossary of terms used in dog food

Animal Digest: This is the dry by-product of rendered meat. During rendering, all usable animal parts (including fetal tissues and glandular wastes) are heated in vats and the liquid is separated from the dry meal. This meal is covered with charcoal and labeled "unfit for human consumption" before processing it into pet food. Digest can also include intestines, as well as the contents of those intestines, such as stool, bile, parasites and chemicals.

Animal Fat and Tallow: Animal fat is a "generic" fat source that is most often made up of rendered animal fat, rancid restaurant grease or other oils that are deemed inedible for humans. Tallow is low quality hard white fat that most animals find hard to digest, not to mention the cardiac risks resulting.

Chemical Preservatives: Chemical preservatives include BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole), BHT (butylated hydroxytolulene), propyl gallate, propylene glycol (also used in automotive antifreeze and is suspected of causing red blood cell damage) and ethoxquin, are all potentially cancer causing agents that your pets are eating every day.

Chicken By-products: These are ground parts from poultry carcasses such as feet, heads, feathers, intestines, necks and undeveloped eggs and can include any rendered material.

Corn Products: Corn products including corn meal, gluten and grits are cheap, allergy causing fillers and are very difficult for animals to digest.

Food Fragments: Lower end by-products of the food manufacturing process, examples include wheat bran and brewers rice which are a waste product of the alcohol industry.

Ground Whole Grain Sorghum: The feed value of grain sorghum is similar to corn and is grown primarily as a feed grain for livestock.

Meat and Bone Meal: "Meat" and bone meal are inexpensive sources of animal protein. Note that these companies do not clarify the source of "meat", nor are they human-grade meat. The protein in Meat meal containing a large amount of processed bone may not be digestible and fail to provide adequate nutrition.

Meat Based: A label that say "meat based" may also include blood vessels, tendons, organs and other parts of the rendered animal. Note again that these companies do not clarify the source of "meat", nor are they human-grade meat products.

Meat By-products: Pet grade meat by-products consist of organs and parts not desired or not fit for human consumption. This can include organs, bones, blood and fatty tissue. It can also include brains, feet, heads, intestines and any other internal parts. Unbelievably, by-products can also contain the diseases the animal died from, such as cancer, tumors, worms, parasites, etc.

Choosing dog food is a very personal decision, and no one formula is ideal for any breed. High protein, meat-based diets are not simply for pets with kidney/urinary issues or high metabolism pets, they are ideal for many because of the fact that dogs and cats are carnivores, not meant to eat grains or fillers. Grains are fillers, and metabolize into sugar, causing a gammit of problems including allergies, behavior issues and also poor muscle building. Food companies add corn/wheat etc to keep the price down and an important factor to keep in mind is that when you feed a higher quality food, you don't end up paying more in the long run because your pet needs to eat less in order to receive optimal nutrition from the food, not to mention the money saved on vet bills resulting from problems caused by poor quality nutrition. Foods full of fillers equal "garbage in/garbage out", meaning more food is required in order to receive the necessary nutrition, more stool is output to rid the body of grains and fillers that are unnecessary and undigestible (such as corn). We believe you should spend your money on your pet, not your vet.

The most important thing for anyone considering a new food is to read...read...read the label. First ingredient should be a human grade meat. Corn, Wheat, Glutens, BHA, BHT, Ethoxyquin, By- products, Animal Digest and chemicals/preservatives are all ingredients you want to avoid! I can't begin to tell you how many clients come in with the label of their current pet food and are appalled to see what is actually in the food they are feeding, because they didn't read the label, or most commonly, simply did not understand what the ingredients were.

Most independent pet stores offer frequent buyer benefits, and the smaller independent retailers are more likely to be knowledgeable regarding nutrition. It is not as important where you shop as it is to be informed about what your pet requires for ultimate health, and to be informed about the toxic effects of many ingredients that are in grocery store/big box/mass produced brands.

Be sure that whatever pet food you choose to feed your furry friend, you are informed about your choices and feel that you have a good relationship with your pet store to feel comfortable that they are knowledgeable about ingredients in each of the formulas available.