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# Who's Minding the Pet Food Store?



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## Who's Minding the Pet Food Store?

While the **ultimate responsibility for ensuring that US pet owners are feeding their pets safe and nutritious foods** lies with the **Department of Agriculture** and the same **Food and Drug administration** which oversees the **safety of human food**, both of these agencies turn to testing done by the **American Feed Control Officials**, or [AAFCO](#), to set the **standards for what ingredients should be permitted in dog food**.

You, as a caring pet owner, will benefit from knowing just **how the AAFCO arrives at its recommendations** so you are able to then choose the **best dog foods for your best friend**.

## The AAFCO Standards

When it comes to **pet food**, the AAFCO has created a **uniformed model and definition for the ingredients** which provides a **common understanding** of what is in each serving, including a **common labeling procedure**. That way there is no confusion and no contradictions between **differing brands and types of pet food**. This information is provided in an annual publication: the AAFCO Manual.

The AAFCO Statement, also referred to as **Nutritional Adequacy**, is given to those **pet foods** that have **passed the requirements** found in the AAFCO Manual. This statement is required on **all pet foods** and helps to ensure that the **pet food is safe**. Of course, many **manufacturers** such as those common to the **Premium foods** will make strides to go above and beyond the standards set forth by AAFCO.

There are generally two types of AAFCO statements:

- **Pet foods with a statement such as “Tested...”** have seen an actual trial with **cats or dogs eating the product and receiving positive results**.
- **Those foods with a “Formulated” statement** have not seen an actual trial but the **product has been manufactured** to meet the **recommendations and the guideline** set forth by AAFCO.

**To meet the AAFCO guidelines** and to receive the AAFCO Statement, **pet foods sold on the market** have to be graded and judged before distribution. With AAFCO being the only body to **grade and judge the quality of the pet food**, it is important to look for the AAFCO statement located on the label.

There are **two nutritional profiles used to grade dog food; Adult maintenance and Growth (used for**

puppies). With these profiles in mind, **AAFCO determines the nutrients** that are needed for each category. The **nutrients** must meet standards **above the minimum requirement** and **below the maximum requirement** as to avoid **deficiencies and over-nutrition** respectively. These profiles must be defined on the bag. There is a third profile “**Fit for all life stages**” which **meets stricter requirements** and are **suitable for both puppies and adults**.

The testing protocol that is used by AAFCO has come under fire recently, but the tests used have proven adequate when it comes to **determining safe products and products fit for the different nutritional profiles**. Dog food manufacturers follow the findings of these tests in order to **deliver quality products** to the consumer and, of course, to the dogs which benefit from the information and diet that is provided. **AAFCO’s tests are among the most trusted and one of the only tests performed on dog food and pet food overall**. They have been followed and used as guidelines since the organization’s formation in 1909. These protocols are enough to **determine which foods go to the market and which foods are unfit to feed to our dogs**.



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Now, the **AAFCO tests are for a relatively short** amount of time compared to the **length of the dog’s life span**. With this in mind, it is important that other factors are taken into account when **deciding the best diet for your pet**. While the AAFCO tests are important and even vital when **choosing dog food**, also keep in mind that your **dog may have specialized requirements and circumstances** that will affect the results. **Trial testing in home is also recommended** to make certain that your **dog is receiving the needed nutrients** without the adverse results.

The **AAFCO tests do show us the performance of the food being tested**, the **digestibility of the nutrients** in the food and **how willing the dogs are to accept the food**. When deficiencies are detected in the AAFCO trials, they are able to be **corrected and improved, creating a superior product**.

It is important to **look for the AAFCO statement when purchasing dog food** along with **quality ingredients** which can be found in **Premium foods**. While **lower quality foods**, those containing **corn based feed**, or items like **bone and meat meal**, may pass these tests, owners must understand that **AAFCO needs to make sure lower quality and higher quality dog food are suitable for purchase**.

So don't settle for the **cheapest food with the AAFCO approval statement**. You know your dog better than anyone else, and you know his or her **special health and energy requirements**. Give them the **best dog foods** you can, within your budget. We'll discuss in much more [detail what the various label ingredients](#) on

AAFCO foods really mean for your dog, and you'll feel much better when the AAFCO's vigilance is backed up by your own!

Sharda Baker has published several dog ebook and audios, including the internet best selling ["Complete Guide to Your Dog's Nutrition"](#).

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