



# 3 pet food label myths

With so many pet food options, choosing the right diet for your dog or cat can be tricky. As your veterinary team, we can help you select the best foods based on our knowledge of nutrition and our experience with many pets, ignoring the blizzard of marketing ploys designed to appeal to your emotional needs rather than your pets' nutritional needs.

## Myth 1:

**Foods labeled "premium" or "gourmet" are always better for your pet.**

**Truth:** Some pet food companies call out other manufacturers for using ingredients such as corn or meat meal, knowing full well that the food's ingredients are not the critical factor. What's important are the nutrients contained in those ingredients. It's also important to know that products with these labels are not required to contain any particular type of ingredient, nor are they held to any higher nutritional standards than other complete and balanced products. Manufacturers, nutritionists and pet owners simply can't predict a food's performance based on its ingredient list because there are too many unknowns: what the exact ingredients are and where they came from, ingredient quality and consistency, how much of each ingredient is present in the food and the effects of processing.

## Myth 2:

**The best food for your pet is one that lists real meat as the first ingredient.**

**Truth:** Some manufacturers also make unsubstantiated claims about ingredients and manipulate their own ingredient lists. For example, some dry food manufacturers tout real chicken, fish or beef as their first ingredient because the food contains more of this ingredient by weight than any other ingredient. What they don't explain is that "real meat" is mostly water weight, and when the water is removed during the manufacturing process, meat moves way down on the ingredient list. They also neglect to mention that the technical term for "real meat" is mechanically deboned meat, also known as "white slime!"

## Myth 3:

**The order of the ingredients is the most important factor in selecting your pet's diet.**

**Truth:** Another pet food label trick some manufacturers play is called ingredient splitting, where they list different carbohydrates separately—corn, rice, barley, wheat and oatmeal, for example—or list different forms of the same carbohydrate, such as ground wheat and wheat flour, so these individual carbs appear lower in the ingredient list. Doing so makes it appear as if carbohydrates are not the first ingredient.

**FACT:** Your veterinarian can help you choose foods based on your pet's physical condition, lifestyle, any disease issues and other related health factors, as well as on your preferences. So before you reach for a food you heard about on a commercial, talk with your veterinary team to get a recommendation tailored to both your and your pet's needs and preferences.