

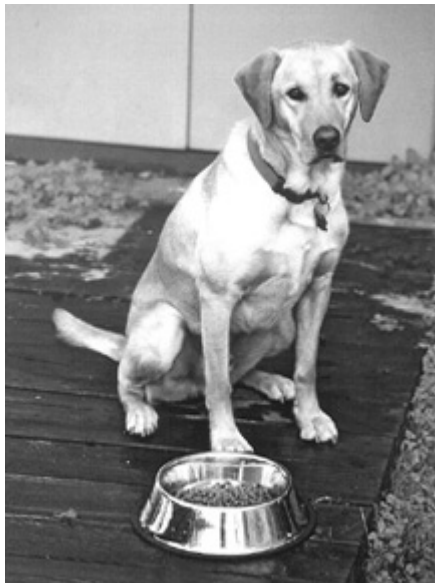
New Top Dry Dog Foods

February 2003

Hurray! An industry-wide trend toward better ingredients has begun.

by Nancy Kerns

A few months ago, the owner of a small, premium pet food company remarked to me, “If the giant food companies ever started using top-quality ingredients – the kinds of things that are in your ‘Top Dry Foods’ selections – all of us ‘little guys’ are going to be out of business.”



Actually, it has begun; the big dogs of the pet food industry are starting to develop products that contain the sorts of ingredients that Whole Dog Journal has celebrated for the past five years – things like fresh, whole meats, vegetables, fruits, and grains; organically raised meat and poultry; healthful herbs; and natural colloidal trace minerals.

Fortunately for all the small makers of premium foods, the ones who have been committed to achieving truly excellent products for years, the giant food conglomerates have not really put all the pieces together – yet.

Don't obsess about which food is the very best. It's better for your dog to rotate between three to four very good foods.

Take Hill's Pet Nutrition's latest launch, for example. Hill's has identified a fast-growing niche within the \$12.4 billion pet food market in the US: discriminating pet owners who want “natural” foods for their beloved animal

companions. Hill's cites some statistics on its Web site that explain its interest in the "natural" niche: The number of "natural" products increased by 38 percent in 2001; the largest natural food supermarket chain is growing at a 20 percent clip; sales of natural and organic foods are growing at an 18 percent annual rate and are projected to surpass \$17 billion this year.

Given these facts, Hill's came up with this: Science Diet Nature's Best™, a line of "all-natural" dog (and cat) foods with "high quality, naturally preserved ingredients." Nature's Best does contain whole beef, peas, and carrots. That's a huge step in the right direction for a conglomerate food maker – even if these ingredients are way down in the 7th, 9th, and 10th places, respectively, on the list of ingredients.

Small companies still the best

As I hinted above, WDJ's "Top Dry Food" makers needn't be too worried about efforts like Hill's – yet. Nature's Best is a better product than Purina's effort (the execrable "Beneful") to appeal to the "granola and tofu" segment of the pet-owning population, but it's not "top-quality" (see comparison charts, end of story).

Nevertheless, the wheels are turning. The pet food industry leaders have finally realized there are millions of people who are willing to pay a lot for foods that can help keep their animal companions as healthy as possible for as long as possible. The savvy marketers among them have already taken aim on us free-spending health nuts; witness the plethora of new products with the words "holistic" and "natural" in their names, or at least in giant letters on the front of the bags.

Small pet food companies that are committed to producing top-quality foods have one big advantage over the corporate giants: Their production runs are small enough that they can formulate foods using ingredients of amazing quality, and the consumers most committed to their dogs' health will pay whatever these foods cost. For the present, these are the companies who are making the healthiest foods. (The small companies may not make the most consistent products, however; see "Made in a Secret Location," WDJ January 2003.)

But (as the pet food company owner I quoted earlier suggested), if some of the bigger companies applied their ingredient purchasing power, self-owned and -operated manufacturing plants, and giant advertising budgets to work on products that contained even just good-quality ingredients, they could pose a real danger to the roughly 13 percent of the pet food market

collectively served by all the little companies. Currently, that's what's left of the US pet food market-share pie after Nestlé Purina takes its 30 percent; Iams takes its 14 percent; Hill's, MasterFoods USA, and Ol' Roy take 10 percent each; and Nutro takes its 5 percent.

It's worth it

Because virtually all the foods that are on our "Top Dry Foods" lists, past and present, are represented among that tiny 13 percent market share, you can expect them to be more difficult to find. Recently I was amused by an honest counterperson – obviously a new hire – at a really great independent pet supply store, where I was asking about an obscure new food. She said, "Is that a dog food you've seen on TV? Because if you've seen it on TV, we don't have it. I've never heard of any of the foods we have here," she finished ruefully. Let me just say, "That's our kind of pet store!"

By and large, the giant chain pet supply stores carry few foods we consider to be really good. (I got in trouble last year when I said none of the giant chain stores carry any of our selections. A few carry a few.) In general, you have to look for independent pet supply stores owned by really knowledgeable dog people. Many of the makers of the foods we highlight will sell directly to pet owners, sometimes splitting shipping costs. In other cases, I've heard of people approaching their local groomer, breeder, or even health food store, and asking the store owner to carry one or two of the foods they like best. If the buyer can tell the store owner that he or she will buy a certain amount of the food monthly, and convince X number of their friends to buy that food, too, the store owner may be able to expand his inventory to include that food.



The words "Holistic" and "Natural" appear on the labels of many new foods, including our selections – but that's certainly not why we picked 'em.

Expect to pay more for top-quality foods – maybe two or three times more than you may have paid for lesser-quality products. Top-quality foods are necessarily expensive because top-quality ingredients cost more than food fragments cast off from the human food industry.

What we did and didn't do

We did something new this year. Instead of essentially re-reviewing many of our past selections, we concentrated on finding products that we've never listed before. All of our past picks (listed below left) still meet our selection criteria (which is listed directly below). As you'll see, we've "deselected" only one of our past picks: Best In Show, whose maker has gone out of business.

In every case, all the different varieties or "flavors" of a given dog food line are also approved. For example, we like the entire "Prairie" line of foods made by Nature's Variety, not just the lamb-based food. However, some manufacturers (such as Royal Canin) make several different lines or "families" of foods, targeted to very different price points and formulated accordingly. Unless we indicated an additional line or family was approved, assume it is not.

- The following are things we did NOT do when we selected our past and new "Top Dry Foods."
- We DID NOT reject any of our past selections. All of our past selections (listed at end of story) still meet our selection criteria.
- We DID NOT conduct lab tests to make sure the "Guaranteed Analysis" printed on the label accurately reflects the contents; that's the job of state feed control officials.
- We DID NOT inspect manufacturing plants or verify ingredient claims. For example, some companies say they use organically grown foods, or human-grade ingredients. At some point in the future, we'll be asking manufacturers to show us proof that these ingredients are what they say they are. We'll keep you posted.
- We DID NOT select foods on the basis of protein or fat content; more is not always better. Some dogs need more; some dogs need less. It's a good idea to note the protein and fat content of any food that seems to suit your dog, as well as the levels in foods that distress him. This information can help you make future selections.
- We DID NOT examine every food on the market. That would be impossible! You may find a food that looks as good or better than ours. Good for you! Send us some information about it; we'd love to share.

- We DID NOT rank-order the foods. They are presented in alphabetical order.

Choose three or four

We can't say it enough, so we'll say it in capital letters: THERE IS NO SINGLE "BEST" FOOD. We still like all the foods we've chosen in past years, and we like all these newer foods, too.

To determine which ones might be most appropriate for your dog, you will have to try a few. All dogs are different; some do better on higher-protein foods, some do better on lower-protein foods. Some can't digest chicken. Some break out if they eat wheat. Try a likely candidate for a month or two. If your dog has problems, it doesn't mean it's a "bad" food; it just disagrees with your dog. Give the food away and try another one!

If, on the other hand, your dog has had chronic health problems, such as infected ears, itchy paws, or runny eyes, and these symptoms clear up, you're on the right track. A good dog food will contribute to a healthy coat, good energy level, balanced temperament, and flawless health.

Don't feed only one food for the rest of your dog's life, either. That's a surefire way to help him develop food allergies or intolerances. Any nutrient deficiency, excess, or imbalance expressed in a food can become entrenched in your dog's body if that's all he's fed for years on end. (See "Variety Is the Spice of Life," WDJ June 2001, for more information about the importance of occasionally switching foods.)

WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

Don't let pictures and adjectives on dog food bags influence your selection! Look at the ingredient list first.

Compare the ingredients to our selection criteria.

If you can't find any top-quality foods at pet supply stores near you, call some manufacturers and suggest they market their products at an independent pet retail outlet near you.

Be prepared to pay more for top-quality foods; they will keep your dog healthier in the long run.

WDJ's Approved "Top Dry Foods" 1998-2002

Azmira Classic	Azmira Holistic Animal Care, Tucson, AZ	(800) 497-5665
Back to Basics	Beowulf Natural Foods, Syracuse, NY	(800) 219-2558
Best in Show	OUT OF BUSINESS	NA
California Natural, Innova	Natura Pet Products, Santa Clara, CA	(800) 532-7261
Canidae	Canidae Corp., San Luis Obispo, CA	(800) 398-1600
Eagle Pack Holistic Select	Eagle Pet Products, Inc., Mishawaka, IN	(800) 255-5959
Flint River Ranch, Dry Water, LC	Flint River Ranch, Riverside, CA	(909) 682-5048
Hund-N-Flocken, Mmillennia	Solid Gold Health Products for Pets, El Cajon, CA	(800) 364-4863
Limited Diets Duck & Potato	Innovative Veterinary Diets, Pittsburg, PA	(800) 359-4483
Natural Balance Ultra Premium	Dick Van Patten's Natural Balance, Pacoima, CA	(800) 829-4493
Lifespan	Petguard, Orange Park, FL	(800) 874-3221
Pinnacle	Breeder's Choice Pet Foods, Irwindale, CA	(800) 255-4286
Prime Life	Owen & Mandeville Pet Products, Oxford, CT	(888) 881-7703
PHD Canine Growth & Maintenance	Perfect Health Diet Products Inc., White Plains, NY	(800) 743-1502
Showbound Naturals	Integrated Pet Products, Exton, PA	(800) 542-4677
Timberwolf Organics	Yukon Nutritional Co., Lake Wales, FL	(863) 439-0049
Wellness Super5 Mix Lamb	Old Mother Hubbard, Lowell, MA	(800) 225-0904
Wysong Maintenance	Wysong Corporation, Midland, MI	(800) 748-0233

WDJ's Selection Criteria: What the List of Ingredients Indicates

The hallmarks of a high-quality food include the following:

- ✓ **Superior sources of protein.** This means either whole, fresh meats or single-source meat meal (for example, chicken meal rather than poultry meal).
- ✓ **A whole-meat source as one of the first two ingredients** (chicken or chicken meal, for instance). Better yet would be *two* meat sources among the top three ingredients (say, chicken *and* chicken meal). Whole, fresh meat is a wonderful, healthy food for dogs, but it also contains a lot of water, and the extra weight of that moisture usually boosts the fresh meat to the top of the list of ingredients (which, by law, are listed in order of their weight contribution to the food). If a list of ingredients begins with whole chicken, followed by three or more grains and *no* other meat proteins, it's likely that the food contains *way* more grain than meat. There is no way to know for sure, however, since the makers are not required to specify the amounts or percentages of each ingredient.

By the way, dry foods *can't* contain more than about 50 percent meat or other animal products; any more than that, and the machinery that mixes and extrudes the kibble gets gummed up.

Meat is the most natural source of protein for canines, and contains the amino acids most important to canine health. A mix of meat proteins (such as fish and beef) helps round out the amino acid profile of the proteins included in the food.

- ✓ **Whole, unprocessed grains, vegetables, and other foods.** A previously unprocessed food has the best chance of surviving the food-making process with some of its nutrients intact.

High-quality dry foods should contain a MINIMUM of the following:

- ↓ **Food fragments.** Fragments are lower-cost by-products of another food manufacturing process, such as brewer's rice (a waste product of the alcohol industry) and wheat bran (the fibrous hull removed from the nutritious wheat kernel). Most foods contain at least one fragment, as makers attempt to keep the food affordable. Beware of a product that contains several fragments of a single food. Some food makers do this to disguise an






excess of a low-value ingredient. Remember, the law dictates that each ingredient is listed separately by weight. So when you see a list of ingredients that begins "lamb, rice flour, rice bran, brewer's rice . . ." you should be aware that there is far more rice in the product than lamb.

- ↓ **Meat by-products.** We've moderated our stance on meat by-products; we used to discard any food that contained them. We've been convinced, however, that *fresh* by-products may offer more nutrient value than a rendered meat meal. But using an animal by-product (or more than one animal by-product) for a food's *main* protein source is indicative of a lower-quality product. We'd prefer to see these products play a supporting role to whole meats or meat meals, say, somewhere below the top five ingredients. However, please note our ban on "generic" ingredients (below); no "animal by-products" allowed.

Hallmarks of a low-quality dry food:


- ✗ **"Generic" fats or proteins.** "Animal fat," for example, can be just about anything: recycled grease from restaurants, or an unwholesome mystery mix of various fats. In this case, a preferable ingredient would be "beef fat" or "chicken fat." "Animal protein" and "poultry protein" are far inferior to "beef protein" or "chicken protein."
- ✗ **Artificial preservatives** (including BHA, BHT, or Ethoxyquin).
- ✗ **Artificial colors.** Your dog doesn't care what color his food is. He doesn't need a daily – *lifetime* – exposure to these unnecessary chemicals.
- ✗ **Propylene glycol.** Ditto for this chemical, which is added to some "chewy" foods to keep them moist.
- ✗ **Sweeteners.** Dogs, like humans, have a taste for sweets. Corn syrup, sucrose, ammoniated glycyrrhizin, and other sweeteners are sometimes added to lower-quality foods to increase their appeal. But dietary sugar can aggravate health problems in dogs, including diabetes.

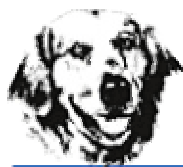
WDJ'S NEW TOP DRY FOODS

MAKER, CONTACT INFO	VARIETY	MIN. % PROTEIN	MIN. % FAT	MAX. % FIBER	MAX. % MOISTURE	FIRST 10 INGREDIENTS	NOTES
ARTEMIS Artemis Pet Foods Canoga Park, CA (800) 282-5876 artemispetfood.com	 "Natural 6 Mix"	23	14	2.9	10	Chicken meal, turkey meal, brown rice, brewer's rice, lamb meal, oatmeal, chicken fat (nat. preserves), dried beet pulp, dried eggs, fish meal . . .	Contains digestive enzymes and probiotics. Label includes "best used by" date and states amounts of Omega-3 and Omega-6. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard. Company sent notarized statement to certify that food is made with 44.80 total meat protein. Awesome.
BENCH & FIELD Bench & Field Pet Foods, LLC Mishawaka, IN (800) 525-4802 benchandfield.com	"Holistic Natural Canine Formula"	24	15	4.9	10	Chicken meal, ground brown rice, whole ground barley, fish meal, chicken, chicken fat (nat. preserves), dried beet pulp, amaranth, oatmeal, tomato pomace . . .	Label claims certified organically grown chicken is used in food. Label also states amounts of Omega-3, Omega-6, and glucosamine hydrochloride. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard. Bench & Field makes other foods, none near the quality of this food. Sold in stores (we found it at Trader Joe's) and online (direct-shipped to consumer).
BURNS Burns Pet Nutrition Chesterston, IN (877) 983-9651 bpn4u.com	"Brown Rice & Ocean Fish"	18.5	7.5	2.2	9	Brown rice, ocean fish meal, peas, oats, chicken fat, sunflower oil, seaweed, (vitamins and minerals)	Products were developed by John Burns, MRCVS, a Scottish veterinarian. Sold through independent outlets and directly from Web site. Product literature states that no genetically modified ingredients are used.
DRS. FOSTER & SMITH Drs. Foster & Smith Rhineland, WI (800) 826-7206 drsfostersmith.com	"Adult Maintenance Formula, Chicken & Brown Rice"	24	14	3.5	10	Chicken, chicken meal, brown rice, whole barley, rice, rice bran, chicken fat, natural flavor, whole ground flaxseed, egg product . . .	Things are getting interesting in the world of dog food. Drs. Foster & Smith is a LARGE catalog company that sells all sorts of dog care items. Selling their own signature label food is a new venture for the catalog, as is selling three other foods (lams, Eukanuba, and Old Mother Hubbard's "Wellness"). Product literature brags about their food's lack of artificial preservatives, colors, and flavors – very WDJ, if we do say so ourselves.
GO! NATURAL For Paws Services, Inc. Abbotsford, BC (866) 864-6112 forpaws.ca	"Super Premium Chicken, Fruit & Vegetable Diet"	24	14	3.5	10	Chicken meal, chicken meat, whole brown rice, whole white rice, hull-less barley, sunflower oil, chicken fat (nat. preserves), salmon meal, dried whole potatoes, rice bran . . .	 We were surprised to see this relatively new product being well displayed and supported at a "big box" pet food chain store in our area. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard. Label also states levels of Omega-3, Omega-6, glucosamine, chondroitin, and KCal/cup (617).
ROYAL CANIN Royal Canin USA St. Peters, MO (800) 592-6687 royalcanin.com	 "Natural Blend Adult Formula"	26	15	3.0	10	Chicken meal, brown rice, chicken, oatmeal, brewer's rice, chicken fat (nat. preserves), dried tomato pomace, natural flavors, flaxseed, fish meal . . .	Also includes probiotics and prebiotics. Label states Omega-3 and Omega-6 levels. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard. According to label, this product meets ISO 9001 certification (an international standard of management quality). On bag we bought, "Best used by" date was missing.
PRAIRIE Nature's Variety Lincoln, NE (888) 519-7387 naturesvariety.com	"Lamb & Rice Medley"	24	14	3.0	10	Lamb, barley, brown rice, oatmeal, canola oil (nat. preserves), flaxseed, Menhaden fish, uncured alfalfa meal, montmorillonite (an organic trace mineral compound), flaxseed oil . . .	 Very interesting company; definitely targeted at health-conscious consumers. Product literature states that dry food flavors should be rotated, and that the dry foods should be rotated with their other products: canned, raw frozen, and freeze-dried. Company also sells raw frozen bones, special dried meaty bones, and treats. Many products include some organic meats, fruits, vegetables, sprouts, and eggs. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard.
VERUS VeRus Pet Foods Abingdon, MD (888) 828-3787 veruspetfoods.com	"GP Advantage Diet: Chicken Meal, Oats & Brown Rice"	26	16	4.0	12	Chicken meal, ground oat groats, ground brown rice, chicken fat (nat. preserves), lamb meal, rice bran, flaxseed, chicory pulp, alfalfa meal, dried kelp . . .	 Company sent WDJ certificates to prove its ingredients are the top-quality ingredients they say they are. We'll be asking the makers of all our other "Top Foods" contenders if they will do the same; should be interesting. VeRus also makes a fish and potato-based food. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard.

THE FOLLOWING ARE "NOT RECOMMENDED"

... AND HERE IS WHY

NATURE'S BEST Hill's Science Diet	 "Adult Dog, With Real Beef"	21.5	12.5	3.5	10	Brewer's rice, ground wheat, turkey meal, corn gluten meal, soybean meal, animal fat (nat. preserves), beef, vegetable oil, peas, carrots . . .	A protein source appears only third on the list of ingredients, and it's not the meat pictured or named on the front of the bag. Beef appears well down the list. We don't like the use of "animal fat" – a low-cost product of dubious, mixed origin. For what it's worth, however, we would consider this Science Diet's best offering to date, given the two whole vegetables included, its natural preservatives (the company usually favors artificial preservatives), and lack of artificial colors. And this product is WAY better than the next food (below) . . .
BENEFUL Nestlé Purina Petcare	(only one variety)	25	10	4.0	14	Ground yellow corn, chicken-by-product meal, corn gluten meal, whole wheat flour, beef tallow (nat. preserves), rice flour, beef, soy flour, sugar, sorbitol . . .	Nothing redeems this food in our opinion, with its <i>dried</i> peas and carrots (20th and 21st on the list of ingredients), two types of sweeteners (9th and 10th on the list), and artificial colors.



Good Enough to Eat?

February 2004

How to select the best dry food for your dog, and why you oughta.

by Nancy Kerns

How do you select your dog's food? Do you buy what your favorite veterinarian tells you to buy? Grab whatever is on sale? Feed what your dog's breeder sent him to you with? Allow your dog to sniff the bags in the pet supply superstore and choose the one he spends the most time with? For shame! None of these methods gives your dog his best chance at eating top-quality food.



It's a competitive market; take the pictures and label claims with a grain of salt, but scrutinize the ingredients list.

Forthwith, we'll tell you how we pick a winning food. We'll list some examples of newer foods that meet our selection criteria – which we have refined over the six years that we've been reviewing foods – and present a list of all the foods that we have ever chosen to feature as a “WDJ approved food.” After all that, we expect you to be able to identify superior foods, and hope that you'll see the wisdom in buying them.

WDJ's selection criteria

Here's how we select which dry foods are worthy of our dogs' digestion (as well as a spot on our

“approved foods” list): • We look for foods that contain a lot of animal proteins. Extruded food cannot contain more than 50 percent meat; it “gums up” the extruders. We like it when manufacturers tell us the

approximate percentage of meat, poultry, or fish proteins in a food, but they rarely do. So we look for foods with lots of animal protein sources at the top of the ingredients list. Two animal proteins in the first three ingredients? Cool! Three in the top five? Right on! Two in the top five? Well, okay . . . Only one in the top five? That food better have a lot of other things going for it. (A good example is Karma, reputedly the first and only dry dog food on the market that is 95-100 percent organic.)

The thing is, we can't reduce this to a hard and fast rule. When you look at the ingredients at the top of the list, note the relative position of the protein sources, the total amount of protein in the food, and consider your dog's needs. Is he an elderly couch potato or a lean and active athlete? Keep all of this in mind.

Remember that ingredients are listed on the label by the total weight they contribute to the product. Fresh or frozen whole meats are expensive ingredients for the manufacturer, and tend to be a hallmark of quality. But whole meats also contain lots of water, which is heavy (pushing it toward the top of the ingredient list) but lacks nutrients. Meat meals are nutrient-dense. We have a somewhat baseless affection for foods that contain both whole meat (beef, chicken, fish, etc.) and meat meal (beef meal, chicken meal, fish meal, etc.).

- We reject any food containing meat by-products or poultry by-products. Note: Some of our past selections do contain meat and/or poultry by-products. To winnow down our list to the very best foods possible, we no longer select products that contain meat or poultry by-products.

By-products are not intrinsically bad; in fact, many are highly nutritious. However, by-products are less expensive, and are not always handled as carefully or quickly as more expensive foodstuffs. Poor handling or slow transport of these ingredients can decrease their palatability and nutritional content. Dog owners who are fixated on quality will find it easier to avoid foods that contain by-products than to confirm the quality of the by-products with the food manufacturer.

- We reject foods containing fat or protein not identified by species. "Animal fat" is a euphemism for a low-quality, low-priced mix of fats of uncertain origin. "Meat meal" could be anything. We shudder.

- We look for the use of whole grains and vegetables. That said, some grains and vegetables have valuable constituents that accomplish specific tasks in a dog food formula. So don't go busting our chops because one of

our approved foods has, say, tomato pomace ninth on its ingredients list; tomato pomace is used by some food makers for its contribution to the food's fiber mix and for its lycopene content. Instead, focus your righteous indignation on a food that contains, say, rice flour, rice bran, and brewer's rice, all in the top 10 ingredients.

Many dog food ingredients have gotten undeserved poor reputations – casualties of the “premium” foods marketing wars. It really depends how many fractions are used and which positions on the ingredients list they occupy. Look for an upcoming article about the relative value and uses of various vegetable and grain fractions.

- We eliminate all foods with artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives listed on their ingredients panels. Note: Some ingredients – usually fats, and some fish products – arrive at the pet food factory containing artificial preservatives; these do not have to be disclosed on the ingredient list, since the maker did not add them.
- We offer (fictional) bonus points for foods that offer the date of manufacture in addition to the usual “best if used by” date. The fresher the food is, the higher the nutrient content and palatability.

Each food manufacturer formulates their product to deliver adequate nutrition, without spoiling, for a specific length of time – usually, about 12 to 16 months. Factors that affect the functional “shelf life” of a food include the type and amount of preservatives used, the type of bag used, as well as the temperature, humidity, and exposure to light the product is exposed to in transport and storage.

We often recommend that consumers purchase food from outlets that assiduously manage their stock to ensure that the food on the shelves is relatively fresh. This is harder to do without that “born-on” date, but not impossible. If a food label has only a “best if used by” date, check to make sure that it's as far in the future as possible.

- Organic ingredients bring a product to the front of the class, the more, the better.

Why quality matters

How many people do you know who can eat tons of highly processed, fatty, sweet, junk food – and are healthy, strong, and “balanced” in every sense of the word? Maybe a few, but these people are the exceptions. Similarly, some dogs can live forever on the junkiest, cheapest food sold in

the grocery store. These individuals tend to be mixed breeds with hybrid vigor and fewer inherited propensities for disease.

But many of our canine companions are not so lucky. They may have a genetic predisposition for disease; every breed today is prone to at least a couple of emblematic diseases. Many dogs are often stressed out from our lifestyles. They endure exposure to a dizzying range of chemicals: pesticides, herbicides (a romp on the grass, anyone?), air pollutants from building materials in our homes . . . Just think of all the chemicals dogs walk on, barefoot, as it were, and then lick their paws.

We can do a little, but not a lot, to minimize the environmental toxins our dogs are exposed to. But we can give their bodies the nutrients they need to eliminate toxins, build immune defenses, and improve overall health and vitality. We accomplish this by feeding them the equivalent of “health food” – a diet comprised of the freshest and best ingredients possible.

Of course, the best way to accomplish that is to prepare your dog’s diet from fresh, whole foods, the same kind you eat. We frequently publish articles on how to do just that. But those of you who can’t or won’t make your dog’s food can improve matters just by upgrading the dog food you buy.

Prove it!

As with the canned food review we published in December, we tried something new with this installment of our dry food review. We asked most (we missed three) of the companies on our past “Top Food” lists to provide information about their manufacturing operations and ingredients.

First, we asked them to tell us where their foods are made, and we asked them whether they disclose this information to their consumers. As we discussed in “Made in a Secret Location” (January 2003), most pet food companies don’t like revealing anything about their manufacturing operations.

We also asked them to provide us with documentation to substantiate any special claims they make about their ingredients. If they say they use organic ingredients, we wanted to see organic certification documents. If they hint that they use “human grade” ingredients (we’ll discuss that in a second), we asked to see USDA certificates.

“Human grade”

We discussed the phrase “human grade” at greater length in our canned

food review in the December 2003 issue. Technically, legally, NO pet food in this country contains ANY “human grade” ingredients. This is understandably frustrating for the manufacturers who buy truckloads of the exact same chicken and beef and rice that go into your tacos. Suffice to say there are reasons for this regulatory conundrum.

What’s a premium food maker to do? Some manufacturers toe the line on their product labels, but openly refer to their “human grade” ingredients in their product literature and Web sites, in somewhat less-than-open defiance of the law. Others take a modulated approach and say their ingredients “originated” in USDA plants. (That lamb’s mother might disagree, but we know what they mean: “human grade”.)

With no further ado, check out the new foods listed below, and compare it to your dog’s food . . . Ready to switch?

WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

Compare the ingredients of your dog's food with the ingredients in our "approved" foods. If your food measures up to ours, congratulations. If not, consider upgrading.

Be prepared to pay more for top-quality foods. You can't buy gourmet health food at McDonald's prices. Pay for the food now, or the vet later.

Always allow your dog to be the ultimate judge of "what's best" for him. Every body is different; just because a food really works for your neighbor's dog doesn't guarantee it will suit yours.

Some Products Are More “Organic” Than Others

We’ve always said that feeding organic foods is a good idea, especially for dogs who are chemically sensitive, or whose bodies are dealing with a serious illness such as cancer. While there is no consensus among conventional medical practitioners, most holistic veterinarians recognize the importance of reducing our pets (and our own, of course) exposure to chemical pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers.

In our little corner of the world – a community that *really* cares about buying the best quality dog foods – products that contain organic ingredients are *hot*, and more and more premium food manufacturers are coming out with them. But some products are more organic than others! It’s best if you understand what the variations on the word “organic” legally signify.

The National Organic Standards recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) use the following definitions:

“100 percent organic” – Must contain (by weight or volume, excluding water and salt) 100 percent organically produced ingredients. Because all “complete and balanced” dog foods have a vitamin/mineral supplement added to them when manufactured (to assure the proper nutritional content after cooking), and these supplements cannot be organically produced, *no* commercial kibble is “100 percent organic.”

“Organic” – Must contain (by weight or volume, excluding water and salt) not less than 95 percent organically produced ingredients. Any remaining product ingredients must

be organically produced, unless they are not available commercially in organic form, or are nonagricultural substances (such as a vitamin/mineral premix).

NOTE: Only products that are “100 percent organic” or “Organic” may be labeled with the USDA Organic seal.

“Made with organic (specified ingredient/s or food group/s)” – Must contain (by weight or volume, excluding water and salt) at least 70 percent organically produced ingredients.

If a pet food contains less than 70 percent organic ingredients, the organic ingredient/s may be identified only in the ingredient panel; the maker may not use the phrases described above.

Food manufacturers who use one of these statements on their product labels must also include the name of the certifying agent.

Don’t be fooled by products that have the word “organic” (or some oddly spelled variation of this) in their *names*, such as Newman’s Own Organics or Castor and Pollux’s “Organix Canine Formula.” In cases where “organic” is part of the product’s name, the amount of organic ingredients is signified by one of the aforementioned phrases.

For example, the label of Newman’s Own Organics Chicken & Rice Formula dry dog food says, “Made with organic grains and vegetables.” That phrase tells you that it’s made with at least 70 percent organic ingredients, and that all the grains and vegetables on the ingredients panel are organic.

WAS NOT GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN SURVEY	PROVIDED SUBSTANTIATION FOR INGREDIENT CLAIMS	DISCLOSED MAKER TOWDU	DISCLOSES MAKER TO CONSUMERS	MOST RECENTLY DISCUSSED IN WDJ
WDJ's Approved "Top Dry Foods" 1998-2003				
	X	X	X	'03
Artemis Artemis Pet Foods, Canoga Park, CA (800) 282-5876; artemispetfood.com				
	X	X		'02
Azmira Azmira Holistic Animal Care, Tucson, AZ (800) 497-5665; azmira.com				
	X	X	X	'02
Back to Basics Beowulf Natural Foods, Syracuse, NY (800) 219-2558; beowulfs.com				
	X	X		'03
Bench & Field Bench & Field Pet Foods, Mishawaka, IN (800) 525-4802; benchandfield.com				
	X	X	X	'03
Burns Burns Pet Nutrition, Chesterston, IN (877) 983-9651; bpn4u.com				
	X	X	X	'01
California Natural Natura Pet Products, Santa Clara, CA (800) 532-7261; naturapet.com				
	X	X	X	'02
Canidae Canidae Corp., San Luis Obispo, CA (800) 398-1600; canidae.com				
	X	X	X	'03
Drs. Foster & Smith Drs. Foster & Smith, Rhinelander, WI (800) 826-7206; drsfostersmith.com				
	X	X	X	'02
Eagle Pack Holistic Select Eagle Pet Products, Inc., Mishawaka, IN (800) 255-5959; eaglepack.com				
	X			'02
Flint River Flint River Ranch, Riverside, CA (909) 682-5048 (sold through independent reps)				
	X	X	X	'02
Go! Natural Petcurean Pet Nutrition, Abbotsford, BC (866) 864-6112; petcurean.com				
	X	X		'99
Hund-N-Flocken Solid Gold Health Products for Pets El Cajon, CA (800) 364-4863; solidgoldhealth.com				
	X	X	X	'01
Innova Natura Pet Products, Santa Clara, CA (800) 532-7261; naturapet.com				
				'01
Lifespan Petguard, Green Cove Springs, FL (800) 877-petguard; petguard.com				
	X			'01
Limited Diets Innovative Veterinary Diets, Pittsburg, PA (800) 359-4483 (sold through veterinarians only)				

WAS NOT GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN SURVEY	PROVIDED SUBSTANTIATION FOR INGREDIENT CLAIMS	DISCLOSED MAKER TOWDU	DISCLOSES MAKER TO CONSUMERS	MOST RECENTLY DISCUSSED IN WDJ
				
	X	X		'01
Mmilleunia Solid Gold Health Products for Pets El Cajon, CA (800) 364-4863; solidgoldhealth.com				
	X	X	X	'02
Natural Balance Ultra Premium Dick Van Patten's Natural Balance Pacoima, CA (800) 829-4493; naturalbalanceinc.com				
	X	X	X	'02
Pinnacle Breeder's Choice Pet Foods Irwindale, CA (800) 255-4286; breeders-choice.com				
	X	X	X	'03
Prairie Nature's Variety, Lincoln, NE (888) 519-7387; naturesvariety.com				
	X	X	X	'02
Prime Life Owen & Mandeville Pet Products Oxford, CT (888) 881-7703; ompetproducts.com				
	X			'03
Royal Canin Natural Blend Royal Canin USA, Inc., St. Peters, MO (800) 592-6687 (US); (800) 527-2673 (Can) royalcanin.us				
	X	X	X	'02
Showbound Naturals Integrated Pet Products, Exton, PA (800) LI-CHOPS; www.integratedpet.com				
				'02
Timberwolf Organics Yukon Nutritional Co., Dundee, FL (863) 439-0049; timberwolforganics.com				
	X	X	X	'03
VerUS VerUS Pet Foods, Inc., Abingdon, MD (888) 828-3787; veruspetfoods.com				
	X			'02
Wellness Old Mother Hubbard, Lowell, MA (800) 225-0904; oldmotherhubbard.com				
				'01
Wysong Wysong Corporation, Midland, MI (800) 748-0188; wysong.net				
<p>NOTES: All the foods on this list are past "WDJ Top Dry Food" selections, and WAY better than "grocery store" foods. However, a range in quality is still observable. Select the best food you can afford, have access to, and really works for your dog. Please note, also, the NEW foods listed on the next page.</p> <p>Companies with an "X" in the first box did not receive a copy of our survey and so did not have an opportunity to respond to our questions; we apologize.</p> <p>If there is NOT an "X" in the first box, and none of the other boxes are X-ed, either, the company chose not respond to our survey. Interesting, no?</p>				

WDJ'S APPROVED DRY FOODS: NEW IN 2004

MAKER, CONTACT INFO	VARIETY	MIN.% PROTEIN	MIN.% FAT	MAX.% FIBER	MAX.% MOISTURE	DISCLOSED MAKER TOWDJ	DISCLOSES MAKER TO CONSUMERS	PROVIDED SUBSTANTIATION FOR INGREDIENT CLAIMS
BLUE BUFFALO The Blue Buffalo Company Wilton, CT (800) 919-2833 bluebuff.com	"Adult"	24	14	4.0	10	X	X	X
CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE PET LOVER'S SOUL Diamond Pet Products Meta, MO (800) 442-0402 chickensoupforthepetloverssoul.com	 "Adult"	24	14	3.0	10	X	X	X
FOUNDATIONS Petcurean Pet Nutrition Abbotsford, BC (866) 864-6112 petcurean.com	"Chicken & Vegetables"	26	16	3.0	10	X	X	X
FROMM FOUR STAR NUTRITIONALS Fromm Family Foods Mequon, WI (800) 325-6331 frommfamilyfoods.com	"Duck & Sweet Potato"	24	15	3	10	X	X	X
KARMA Natura Pet Products Santa Clara, CA (800) 532-7261 karmaorganic.com	"Karma" 	20	12	3.0	10	X	X	X
MERRICK PET FOODS Merrick Pet Foods Hereford, TX (800) 664-7387 merrickpetcare.com	 "Cowboy Cookout"	22	12	5.0	10	X	X	X
NEWMAN'S OWN ORGANICS Newman's Own Organics Aptos, CA (800) 865-2866 newmansownorganics.com	"Chicken & Rice" 	21	12	4.5	10	X	X	X
ORGANIX Castor & Pollux Pet Works Clackamas, OR (800) 875-7518 castorpolluxpet.com	"Canine Formula"	28	15	3.0	10	X	X	X

MAKER, CONTACT INFO	VARIETY	FIRST 10 INGREDIENTS	NOTES
BLUE BUFFALO The Blue Buffalo Company Wilton, CT (800) 919-2833 bluebuff.com	"Adult"	Chicken, chicken meal, whole ground brown rice, whole ground barley, rye, oatmeal, chicken fat (w/natural preserves.), whole carrots, whole sweet potatoes, ground flax seed . . .	Interestingly, Blue Buffalo mixes unique nutritional pellets in with its kibble. The company calls the pellets "LifeSource Bits," and says they are cold-formed in a separate manufacturing facility to maintain the "full potency" of 24 special ingredients, such as fish oil, glucosamine, spirulina, yucca, and vitamin C. Soon to be available in "lamb & brown rice" and "lite" varieties. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard. 
CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE PET LOVER'S SOUL Diamond Pet Products Meta, MO (800) 442-0402 chickensoupforthepetloverssoul.com	"Adult"	Chicken, turkey, chicken meal, turkey meal, whole grain brown rice, whole grain white rice, oatmeal, potatoes, cracked pearled barley, millet . . .	Aside from the name (which we can't stand, but maybe there is something wrong with us), this is a nice product. Label includes caloric content (min. 336 kcal/cup), and amounts of additional nutrients, including Omega-3 and -6 fatty acids and vitamin E. The maker takes pains with its "Senior" formula, too, listing amounts of glucosamine hydrochloride, chondroitin sulfate, and phosphorus. According to company literature, most pet foods contain excessive phosphorus, which can strain aging kidneys. Meets AAFCO "Feeding Trials" standard.
FOUNDATIONS Petcurean Pet Nutrition Abbotsford, BC (866) 864-6112 petcurean.com	"Chicken & Vegetables"	Chicken meal, hullless barley, oatmeal, ground rice, chicken meal, chicken fat (w/natural preserves.), rice bran, sunflower oil (w/natural preserves.), salmon meal, flax . . .	 Also available in a "lamb & vegetables" variety. Maker states food contains 30 - 35% meat; we like it when companies disclose the total meat content. Label includes caloric content (min. 440 kcal/cup), and amounts of additional nutrients, including Omega-3 and -6 fatty acids, calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin E. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard.
FROMM FOUR STAR NUTRITIONALS Fromm Family Foods Mequon, WI (800) 325-6331 frommfamilyfoods.com	"Duck & Sweet Potato"	Duck, duck meal, pearled barley, sweet potato, brown rice, oatmeal, white rice, whole dried egg, millet, dried tomato pomace . . .	Fromm's "Four Star" line also includes "fish & potato" and "chicken a la veg" varieties. Fromm makes two other lines of foods, though not as appealing as this one. Company is family-owned and -operated, and makes its foods in its own plant. Meets AAFCO "Feeding Trials" standard.
KARMA Natura Pet Products Santa Clara, CA (800) 532-7261 karmaorganic.com	"Karma"	Organic free range chicken, organic kamut, organic brown rice, organic oats, organic barley, organic rice protein, organic whole wheat, organic sunflower seed meal, organic flaxseed meal, organic butter . . .	According to its maker (and to the best of our knowledge), Karma is the first dry dog food to carry the USDA Organic seal, indicating 95% or more organic ingredients; the only ingredient that is not organic is the vitamin/mineral premix, which doesn't exist in an "organic" form. Certified organic by Quality Assurance International, San Diego, CA. Natura discloses the source of several ingredients (including the organic chicken) to consumers. Made in Natura's own certified organic bakery. Label includes caloric content (min. 425 kcal/cup). Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard.
MERRICK PET FOODS Merrick Pet Foods Hereford, TX (800) 664-7387 merrickpetcare.com	"Cowboy Cookout"	Beef, beef liver, beef meal, barley, brown rice, oatmeal, flaxseed, olive oil, fresh sweet potatoes, fresh carrots . . .	Merrick has made pet food in its family-owned and -operated manufacturing plant for other companies for years, and now tries its hand at marketing its own line of foods; this is just one of several great representatives from that line. Also available in chicken, turkey, venison, and buffalo varieties; venison and buffalo also contain Menhaden fish meal to bolster protein content. Label includes caloric content (min. 415 kcal/cup). Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard.
NEWMAN'S OWN ORGANICS Newman's Own Organics Aptos, CA (800) 865-2866 newmansownorganics.com	"Chicken & Rice"	Chicken, organic barley, organic rice, organic milo, organic oats, organic flax seed, chicken meal, organic brown rice, chicken fat (w/natural preserves.), organic carrots . . .	These foods are at least 70% organic. The chicken and chicken meal used in the formula are not organic, but they are superlative ingredients: "Bell & Evans" antibiotic-free, vegetarian-fed chicken. As with all Newman's Own products, Newman donates all after-tax profits from the royalties to educational and charitable organizations; pet food donations go to animal shelters and animal-welfare causes. Certified organic by Oregon Tilth, Salem, OR. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard.
ORGANIX Castor & Pollux Pet Works Clackamas, OR (800) 875-7518 castorpolluxpet.com	"Canine Formula"	Organic chicken, chicken meal, organic peas, organic extruded soy-bean seeds, organic barley, organic brown rice, chicken fat (w/natural preserves.), dicalcium phosphate, salmon meal, natural liver flavor . . .	This food is at least 70% organic, and includes organic chicken. Label includes caloric content (min. 443 kcal/cup), and amounts of additional nutrients, including Omega-3 and -6 fatty acids, calcium, and phosphorus. Certified organic by the Organic Crop Improvement Association, Lincoln, NE. Meets AAFCO "Nutritional Profiles" standard.