

The Fine Print

Deciphering the jargon of dog-food labels.

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The importance of understanding dog-food labels cannot be overemphasized, especially now, in the wake of the pet-food recalls of 2007. The adage says, "We are what we eat," and the same applies to our dogs. If our dogs eat junk food with cheap or inappropriate ingredients, they will eventually suffer for it.

The Regulation of Labels

The makers of dog foods cannot label dog foods as they wish; they are required to follow a number of different regulations as to what must be on the label. This can help the consumer because certain information is required to be on the label, but it can also hurt the consumer because other information is not allowed. This quagmire has been created by a number of different agencies.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a division called the Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM). The CVM specifies what ingredients are allowed in foods and what manufacturing processes are allowed, and they set the standards for health claims for the foods. For example, if a manufacturer says a food will prevent or help treat a specific condition, that claim must be substantiated through the FDA first.

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