

Europe Mulls New Pet Food Marketing Rules

Proposal would establish provisions to list pet food ingredients in descending order of weight, among other regulations.

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The European Commission approved a sweeping new proposal in March that would simplify existing procedures for labeling and marketing pet food and animal feed, including imported products, in the European Union. The European Council (akin to the U.S. Senate) and the European Parliament (akin to the U.S. House of Representatives) will now consider the resolution.

“Concerns have been expressed that the current legislation on the labeling of pet foods does not adequately address customer needs with respect to the appropriateness of the information given,” the European Commission reported. “This may lead to the customer being confused, or at worse misled, as to what the feed they give to their pets contains.”

In addition to providing legal clarity, the regulation is designed to create a more homogenous market.

Overall, the proposal replaces a patchwork of regulations, which the European Commission contended had hindered intra EU trade because different countries interpreted and applied the regulations differently. The European Commission estimates 62 million EU households own pets and, combined, the European pet food and livestock feed market is about \$77 billion (50 billion Euros).

The proposal establishes general provisions for labeling all feed, including indicating the type of feed, name and address of producer, the list of feed additives and the net weight.

In addition, ingredients in feed materials would be listed in descending order of weight, replacing a unreliable system in which labels indicated percentage of total weight for each ingredient (give or take 15 percent), the European Commission reported.

Pet food labels would not require as much detail as livestock feed (for instance, pet food labels could forgo listing the scientific name of feed additives) but would need to include a telephone number that consumers could call for additional information about the food’s contents.

The European Commission expressed concern that use of scientific names (for example, “cobaltous nitrate” for a valuable trace element or “decorticated rapeseed expeller” could actually alienate consumers and prompt them to not use a product simply because they didn’t understand what the ingredients actually were.

In addition, the proposal calls for stakeholders, rather than government, to create a “community catalog of feed materials” that would define ingredients. Shifting this to industry would allow the definitions to be updated more regularly to reflect technological innovations, the European Commission reported. As part of this, the proposal foresees industry developing voluntary good labeling practices that would serve as de facto EU codes. For example, how much chicken must a pet food contain if it is labeled “with chicken” or how to identify specific feed additives.

The regulation could go into effect about 20 days after its final approval, with a one-year transition period.