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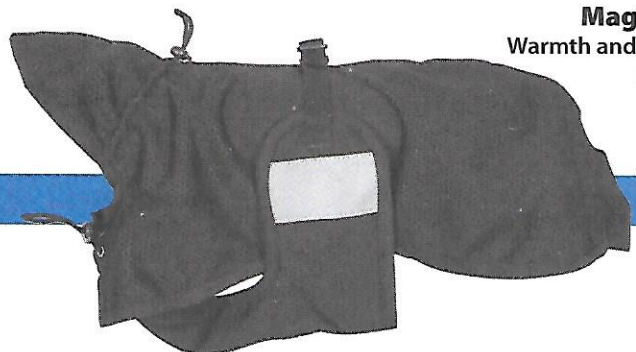


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A Dry Discussion

Whether you are committed to kibble for your dog's diet or feed it intermittently, you should know how to select a good one.

BY NANCY KERNS

You know the old expression, “It’s better to teach someone to fish than it is to give them a fish”? We’re ardent advocates of this approach. We would far rather teach a dog owner how to identify the good, better, and best dry dog foods available to her than to tell her which food is “best” for her dog. But there is one giant obstacle in the way of our teachin’ fishin’ mission.

The obstacle has to do with human nature: An awful lot of you would prefer for us to just give you a fish – that is, you’d rather we just told you which food you should buy for your dog.

It’s a compelling concept, but only if you don’t think about it very deeply. Consider this: Imagine that there was an entire grocery store that sold only dry cereal, canned stew, and frozen dinners, and each and every product in the store was a “complete and

balanced” meal that contained at least the minimum amount (and perhaps a lot more) of protein, fat, carbs, vitamins, and minerals that a *human* needs each day. Cool, huh? Now, what if we told you that you and everyone you know – your elderly parents, your shellfish-allergic spouse, your toddler son, your lactose-intolerant daughter, your pregnant niece, your professional-athlete cousin, your obese uncle, your diabetic aunt, *everyone* – should eat nothing but the Wheaties,

because honestly, we think it’s best. We eat Wheaties, and it’s complete and balanced, so you should, too.

That would be weird, right? But it’s the same as thinking we could tell anyone which specific food, or even which whole *line* of foods from any given manufacturer, is “best” for his or her dog.

Dogs are just as individual as humans. Some stay healthiest on a high-protein, lower-fat food. Some thrive on an Atkins-style, high-protein, high-fat diet. Some get the runs when they eat fish. Grain makes some of them extremely gassy. And so on.

Also, the food we like the best may not be available in your state, or in the store where it’s most convenient for you to shop. And you may not be able to afford a certain food. Not everyone can afford to pay for “the best” food on the market if there are several big dogs in their family.

So, instead of giving you fish – that is, telling you which company’s products or which specific food is “best” for your dog – we’re going to encourage you to try your hand at fishing, instead. We’re going to explain how *you* can tell which foods in *your* favorite pet-supply store, in *your* price range, are the products with the best potential for being good for your dog. *Then* we will tell you how to determine whether they are “working” for your dog. Okay? So let’s get started.



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GOOD INGREDIENTS

In our opinion, the most important factors to consider – the starting place for the search – are the food’s ingredients. The following are desired traits – things you *want to see* on the label.

- ✓ **Lots of animal protein at the top of the ingredients list.** Ingredients in pet food, just like human food, are listed in order of the weight of that ingredient in the formula, so you want to see a top-quality animal protein at the top of the list.
- ✓ **Importantly, that animal protein should be identified by species – chicken, beef, lamb, etc.** “Meat” is an example of a low-quality protein source of dubious origin. “Poultry” is more specific but not specific enough!
- ✓ **Animal protein “meals” are made through a process called rendering, wherein the animal tissues (muscle, fat, skin, connective tissue, and some smaller amount of bone, hair, and/or feathers, depending on the species) are ground, and then heated to separate the fat and reduce the moisture. If it’s made from rendered chicken, the resulting product is chicken meal; if made from lamb, it’s lamb meal, etc. Just as with the fresh animal protein, look for a named species (i.e., “chicken meal”) but avoid “meat meal” or “poultry meal.”**
- ✓ **When a fresh, named meat is first on the ingredient list (such as “chicken”), there should be a named animal-protein meal (such as “chicken meal”) in a supporting role to augment the total animal protein in the diet.** The closer to the top of the ingredient list that this supporting meal appears, the better.

The ingredient list of the best foods will start out with something like, “Chicken, chicken meal . . .” and go on from there. Fresh meat contains a lot of (heavy) water, so if meat is first on the list, it acts like a diluted protein source; while it adds an appealing flavor and aroma to the food, it doesn’t actually contribute that much protein. That’s why *another* named source of animal protein should appear in the top three or so ingredients.

- ✓ **Whole-food ingredients: vegetables, fruits, and/or grains or other carbohydrate sources such as potatoes, peas, chickpeas, or sweet potatoes.** Fresh, unprocessed food ingredients contain nutrients in all their complex glory, with their vitamins, enzymes, and antioxidants intact. Don’t be too alarmed by one or two “fractions” (a byproduct or part of an ingredient, like tomato pomace or oatmeal), especially if they are lower on the ingredient list. But the more fractions present in the food, and the higher they appear on the list, the lower quality the result.

UNDESIRABLE INGREDIENTS

We also think it’s important that you know some ingredients to look *out* for. Avoid the following:

- ✗ **Meat byproducts and poultry byproducts, meat byproduct meal, or poultry byproduct meal.** Some of the animal tissues that go into the ingredients that are identified on labels as animal byproducts are highly nutritious, such as lungs, spleens, kidneys, brains (of some animal species, not all), livers, blood, bone, fat, and emptied stomachs and intestines. Poultry byproducts

also includes necks, feet, and underdeveloped eggs. In addition, poultry byproduct meal may contain poultry heads.

However, believe us when we say that these ingredients are not handled as nicely as the higher-value cuts of meat of which they are “byproducts.” Because they are not headed for human consumption, these products are not kept clean and chilled through processing and transport; it’s a given that whatever bacterial burden may flourish during this time will be reduced by later processing. As they become oxidized – rancid – these animal tissues develop a certain level of peroxide. Pet-food producers may specify byproducts with lower peroxide values, but these cost more.

- ✗ **A “generic” fat source such as “animal fat.”** This can literally be any mixed fat of animal origin; it need not have originated from slaughtered animals. Meaning, it can be obtained from renderers that process dead animals. “Poultry” fat is not quite as suspect as “animal fat,” but “chicken fat” or “duck fat” is better (and traceable).
- ✗ **Added sweeteners.** Dogs, like humans, enjoy the taste of sweet foods. Sweeteners effectively persuade many dogs to eat foods comprised mainly of grain fragments (and containing less healthy animal protein and fats).
- ✗ **Artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives (i.e., BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin).** The color of the food doesn’t matter to your dog. And it should be flavored well enough to be enticing with healthy meats and fats. Natural preservatives, such as tocopherols (vitamin E), vitamin

SOME WELL-KNOWN DRY FOODS, RANKED FROM WORST (LEFT)

KIBBLES ‘N BITS BEEF & CHICKEN

corn
soybean meal
beef and bone meal
ground wheat
animal fat (BHA)
protein 19%, fat 8%

PEDIGREE ADULT

ground whole grain corn
meat and bone meal
corn gluten meal
animal fat (BHA and citric acid)
soybean meal
protein 21%, fat 10%

PURINA DOG CHOW COMPLETE

whole grain corn
meat and bone meal
corn gluten meal
animal fat (mixed tocopherols)
soybean meal
protein 21%, fat 10%

BENEFUL ORIGINAL

ground yellow corn
chicken byproduct meal
corn gluten meal
whole wheat flour
animal fat (mixed tocopherols)
protein 25%, fat 10%



C, and rosemary extract, can be used instead. Note that natural preservatives do not preserve foods as long as artificial preservatives, so owners should always check the “best by” date on the label and look for relatively fresh products.

GIVE IT A TRY

Along the bottom of these two pages is a list of relatively well-known dry dog foods and their first five ingredients. They appear in order of how we would rank them in quality, with the lowest-quality foods on the left, and the better-quality foods on the right.

Why have we put them in this order? First, understand that we wouldn't buy any of the foods on the left page. Not a single one has an animal-protein source at the top of its ingredients list. Instead, each uses corn as its major source of protein. (Note: There is absolutely no difference between the designations each uses for “corn.” All those phrases mean the same thing.) The array of amino acids that make up the protein in corn are not as beneficial for dogs as the amino-acid profile of animal proteins; while dogs can survive on it, it's an unnatural and low-cost protein for them.

We have Kibbles 'n Bits ranked below all the rest, due to the fact that its source of animal protein, the very low-quality “meat and bone meal,” appears lower on its ingredient list (third) than the next foods. Even its low-quality, artificially preserved fat source appears lower on its ingredient list than its competitors. (These things are reflected in its low protein and fat percentages.)

The next two foods are nearly identical, with one small difference: Pedigree uses an artificial preservative on its low-quality fat, so we would rank it lower in quality than the Purina Dog Chow. By the way, corn gluten meal, which appears

third on both of these products' ingredients lists, is a concentrated protein made from corn – again, a lower-cost, lower-quality nutrient for dogs than an animal-protein source.

Beneful has a significantly better animal-protein source than its predecessors; chicken byproduct meal is at least a named animal protein. And it's present in a higher amount than in the preceding foods; see the higher protein content?

We'd start to consider foods that appear on this page. They meet our basic criteria as described above, displaying some of the good traits (a named animal protein first on the list, whole grains, a named supporting animal-protein meal) and minor infractions with the “undesirable ingredients” (brewers rice, a food fragment). We'd call the Hills and the Iams product *nearly* a tie, with the edge in quality going to the Iams food, with the credit given for chicken meal in the fourth spot on the label (rather than fifth, as in the Hill's food). Again, this is reflected in the total amount of protein seen in the food.

We jump upward in quality with the next two foods. The Taste of the Wild product is a grain-free food, so remember to expect it to be higher in protein and fat – not something that every dog can handle. But look at those nice named meat sources – one fresh at the top of the list, followed immediately not one, but two supportive named meat meals. Nice!

We will take another upward jump with the highest-quality product on this list, Orijen. Five ingredients down and there are still no grains or other carbohydrate sources on the ingredient list. It's packed with high-quality named animal proteins, and this is reflected in its high protein content.

By the way, don't be afraid of feeding protein to your dog; he's well suited to utilize it. If you've been warned about

the dangers of too much protein, please see our article “When to Say No to Low-Protein” in the May 2005 issue of WDJ.

Hopefully, you feel comfortable now in reading an ingredient list. Here are just a few more things to look for when considering a new food for your dog.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Many of the other things we want you to read the label for are neither good nor bad, just things you need to be aware of when shopping for your specific dog. Remember, each dog is an individual, and while it's great when it works out that all of your dogs do well on the same food, don't take this for granted.

- ✓ **You will need to become aware of how much protein and fat your dog thrives on** – how much is too much, and how much is too little. Top-quality foods contain a lot more protein (and often, more fat, too) than lower-quality foods, so you may have to reduce the amount of food you feed quite a bit if you switch from a low-quality food to a really good one. (One upside is that good foods are much more digestible, and your dog's poop should shrink a lot, too.)
- ✓ **Look for a “best by” date that's at least six months away.** A best by date that's 10 or 11 months away is ideal; it means the food was made very recently. Note: Foods made with synthetic preservatives (BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin) may have a “best by” date that is 18 months or more past the date of manufacture.
- ✓ **Grain-free or not?** Be aware that grain-free foods generally contain higher protein and fat levels. Also, keep in mind that grain-free does not mean carbohydrate-free; another

TO THE BEST

OUR RANKING IS EXPLAINED ABOVE IN “GIVE IT A TRY”

HILL'S IDEAL BALANCE CHICKEN & BROWN RICE

chicken
brown rice
brewers rice
cracked pearled barley
chicken meal
protein 20%, fat 16%

IAMS HEALTHY NATURALS CHICKEN & BARLEY

chicken
ground whole grain sorghum
ground whole grain barley
chicken meal
brewers rice
protein 25%, fat 14%

TASTE OF THE WILD HIGH PRAIRIE

bison
lamb meal
chicken meal
sweet potatoes
peas
protein 32%, fat 18%

CHAMPION PET PRODUCTS ORIJEN ADULT DOG

boneless chicken
chicken meal
chicken liver
whole herring
boneless turkey
protein 38%, fat 18%

carb source has been employed to take the place of grain (you can't make kibble without any carbohydrate at all). Be sure you can identify the carb used in the food you choose – the most common ones used today are potatoes, sweet potatoes, peas, and chickpeas – and keep track of how well your dog digests it.

- ✓ Some companies use a small amount of **dehydrated or freeze-dried meats** in their formulas. These unprocessed ingredients add both concentrated protein and taste to a finished product, but are wickedly expensive, so they aren't often used in dry food.

LIST OF APPROVED FOODS

Here is the reward for those of you who have applied yourself to “learning to fish.” On the following pages, we've listed a number of companies that make foods that meet our selection criteria. Some of them make just a few foods; some make dozens and dozens of different formulas. Some sell a relatively tiny amount of dog food; some sell quite a bit.

Only a *couple* of companies on this list could be considered corporate titans – and in the case of the ones you may identify as such, you need to look carefully to see which line of their

products has actually met our selection criteria. We predicted a decade ago that if the largest pet-food companies ever wanted to put a lot of small companies out of business, all they would need to do is to produce a *few* formulas that more closely resemble the higher-quality products formulated and marketed by the “boutique” companies, but with the economy of scale and efficiencies of their large production facilities and ability to write big contracts with ingredient suppliers – and you should be able to see that this is happening. Many of you don't trust the “big guys,” but I'm here to tell you that you've never seen cleaner, more professionally run manufacturing facilities and fantastic in-house labs than those operated by “big food.”

The FDA has a site where all the pet food recalls since 2008 are listed (it's here: fda.gov/animalVeterinary/safety-health/recallswithdrawals/default.htm). We've indicated which products on *our* list have had a recall since 2008, what it was for, and when it happened. Keep in mind that we are not terribly concerned about recalls for Salmonella in dry dog food. (To understand why, see “Do You Recall” in the April 2013 of WDJ, as well as “Why Are There So Many Recalls?” in the October 2013 issue.)

We also included information

about the foods' price, but this is fairly unscientific, given that retailers vary wildly in their markup. We gathered prices from a variety of retailers – brick and mortar *and* online. We also checked prices on each variety, in large bags and small bags; the price per pound is much less in large bags than small bags, but not everybody buys (or should buy) large bags. We averaged these prices per pound and came up with these categories:

- \$ Food is less than \$2.50/lb.
- \$\$ Food is \$2.50 to \$3.50/lb.
- \$\$\$ Food is more than \$3.50/lb.

Because of the number of variables, the price range may not be accurate for all foods in all places, but rather a rough guide to help some of you identify which foods may or may not be in your budget. Just remember: To some extent, price does equal quality. While it's highly possible to pay a lot for a mediocre food, you *cannot* buy a great food for less than the cost of the superior ingredients that are needed to make it.

Finally, look for your favorite foods alphabetically under their maker's name. So don't freak out when you don't see Orijen under the O's; it's listed under the name of the company that owns it: Champion Pet Foods. 🐾

ABOUT MANUFACTURERS AND “CO-MANUFACTURERS”

Some companies own and operate their own manufacturing plants; some of *these* make only their own products, and others make their own and other companies' foods, too. Still other companies, especially the smaller ones, use “contract manufacturers,” a.k.a., “co-packers,” to make their foods for them. There are benefits and challenges of both arrangements.

When a company owns and operates its own plant, it has full control of the entire food-making process: sourcing ingredients and managing their in-flow and storage; hiring, training, and managing workers; equipment maintenance and cleaning; product testing (requiring at least a minimal lab, and space and a system for retaining product samples); and so on. When things go wrong, there is no one to blame but themselves; they are in full control of the whole process. Many people feel it's safest to buy products only from those companies that own and operate their own manufacturing facilities.


But owning and running a plant is unthinkable costly; few small companies can afford the expense, so they contract


the services of a co-packer, and build as little or as much control or oversight of the manufacturing process into their contract as they like. Some companies “leave it to the experts,” taking a hands-off approach to the production of their products, while others insist on things like sourcing their own ingredients and having a company representative present for every run of their products, from start to finish.

When a food company hires a competent, ethical contract manufacturer and is educated enough to provide meaningful oversight of the services it hired, the relationship can work out well for all concerned, including you and your dogs.

Unfortunately, when something goes wrong – say, a recall and sick dogs – unscrupulous companies can be quick to point fingers at each other. The co-packer will say it was following the recipe and using the ingredients specified by the dog-food company. The company will say, “That's not what we told them to use! They screwed up!” Lawsuits fly. Settlements happen. Consumers are none the wiser as to who actually messed up, and how. And our dogs pay the price.


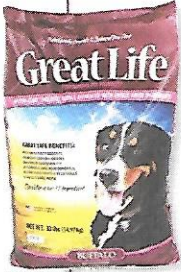
WDJ'S APPROVED DRY DOG FOODS FOR 2015

COMPANY INFO	MFR: SELF OR CO-PACK?	SALES LOCATIONS	VARIETIES, GRAIN-FREE?	MEAT, MEAL, OR BOTH?	PROTEIN RANGE FAT RANGE	RECALLS?	PRICE	NOTES
ADDITION FOODS Kent, WA (425) 251-0330 additionfoods.com	Self, in New Zealand	Ind. stores, direct-ship, online	10, 9 grain-free	Meals; kangaroo variety made with dried meat	22% - 28% 8% - 14%	No	\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very novel proteins for dogs who need them • Foreign manufacturing
AINSWORTH PET NUTRITION (BACK TO BASICS) Meadville, PA (800) 219-2558; backtobasicspetfood.com	Self	Pet Supplies Plus chain, few other ind. stores, online	High Protein: 3 grain-free, potato-free Grain-Free: 3 grain-free,	Both	38% 18% 24% - 26% 14%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All foods made with fresh organ meats as first protein source on the label • "High Protein" line claimed to be more than 70% animal ingredients
ANNA MAET Telford, PA (888) 723-0367 annamaet.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	10, 4 grain-free	Meals	23% - 32% 7% - 20%	No	\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In chicken formulas, company says only low-ash chicken used, with ash @6.8%; formulas containing fish meal and venison are higher in ash (one is 8.5%)
ARTEMIS Carson, CA (310) 513-4090 artemiscompany.com	Co-packed 	Ind. stores, online	FreshMix: 8 Osopure: 3 grain-free Pro: 2	Both Both Pro ALS uses meal; Pro Power uses both	20% - 28% 6% - 17% 23% 14% 23% - 30% 14% - 20%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete nutrient analysis for each food appears on website. • Senior and Weigh Management varieties in Fresh Mix line quite low in fat, and relatively low in protein
AZMIRA Tucson, AZ (800) 497-5665 azmira.com	Co-packed (company does not disclose location)	Ind. stores, online	2	Meals	22% 8%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two varieties are offered: lamb and turkey • Formulated by Dr. Lisa Newman, a holistic animal-care authority
BENCH & FIELD Grand Rapids, MI (800) 525-4802 benchandfield.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, health food stores, Trader Joes, direct ship	1	Meals	24% 15%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one variety is offered
BLUE BUFFALO Wilton, CT (800) 919-2833 bluebuffalo.com	Self and co-packed	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains	Basics: 13, 6 grain-free Freedom: 14 grain-free Life Protection: 23 Wilderness: 25 grain-free	Both Both Both Both	18% - 26% 10% - 15% 18% - 30% 8% - 16% 18% - 29% 6% - 16% 28% - 37% 9% - 16%	Yes; vit. D excesses in Oct 2010	\$\$-\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each line contains puppy, adult, senior, small breed, large breed, and "healthy weight" varieties • Basics line contains only one animal protein per variety (most have turkey; one has salmon) • Freedom and Wilderness lines are grain-free, with tapioca, peas, potatoes, and sweet potatoes used as carb sources. Wilderness line has higher protein and fat levels
BORÉAL Beamsville, ON (800) 253-8128 borealpetfood.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	5, 3 grain-free	Meal, except for grain-free varieties, which use both	27% - 29% 15% - 18%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made in Canada, available only in Canada • Uses Zinpro, a highly bioavailable zinc

COMPANY INFO	MFR: SELF OR CO-PACK?	SALES LOCATIONS	VARIETIES, GRAIN-FREE?	MEAT, MEAL, OR BOTH?	PROTEIN RANGE FAT RANGE	RECALLS?	PRICE	NOTES
CANIDAE San Luis Obispo, CA (800) 398-1600 canidae.com	Some made in-house, some co-packed	Ind. stores, pet specialty chain (Petco)	Pure: 5 grain-free Life Stages: 6	Both Meals	25% - 32% 12% - 18% 21% - 26% 8.5% - 15.5%	Yes; Salmonella in May 2012	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canidae holds all products until independent lab tests show it's safe; then foods are shipped to distributors
CANINE CAVIAR Norco, CA (800) 392-7898 caninecaviar.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	9, 1 grain-free	Dehydrated meats only appear in 4 varieties; meal in 4; both in 1	18% - 31% 9% - 20%	No	\$\$-\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All new formulas recently appeared • A dehydrated meat or meat meal is first on list of all foods except for lower-protein "Special Needs" (where it appears second)
CARNA4 Toronto, Ontario (855) 422-7624 carna4.com	Co-packed in Canada	Ind. stores, pet specialty (Global Pet Supply), online	2, 1 grain-free	Only fresh muscle and organ meats	27% - 29% 16%	No	\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food is baked • No vitamins and minerals are included in formula; it is "complete and balanced" from its food ingredients alone • Complete nutrient profile appears on website
CASTOR & POLLUX Amarillo, TX (800) 875-7518 castorpolluxpet.com	Self	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains (Petco, Petsmart); online	Organix: 7, 2 grain-free Ultramix: 8, 2 grain-free	Both Both	21.5% - 30% 10% - 15% 22% - 38% 9.5% - 17%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most ingredients in the Organix products are organic • Grain-free varieties in each line have highest levels of protein and fat
CENTRAL GARDEN & PET Walnut Creek, CA (866) 500-6286 goactivedog.com apdselectchoice.com avodermnatural.com pinnaclepet.com	Self Self Self Self	Ind. stores Ind. stores Ind. stores, pet specialty chains Ind. stores, online	Active Care: 2 Advanced Pet Diets: 2 AvoDerm: 20, 2 grain-free Pinnacle: 6, 3 grain-free	Meals Meals Most with meals; 5 "Revolving Menu" foods and baked lamb variety use both Both	22% - 25% 12% - 15% 22% - 25% 15% 20% - 30% 8% - 20% 22% - 42% 10% - 22%	No No Yes: Salmonella in 2012 No	\$ \$ \$ \$-\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Care line boasts high levels of glucosamine and chondroitin for healthy joints. However, brown rice is the first ingredient in both varieties in this line. • Complete nutrient analyses are on the websites for all Advanced Pet Diets, AvoDerm, and Pinnacle varieties. • Three of AvoDerm's varieties are baked, not extruded. All contain avocado. • Pinnacle foods contain only one animal protein per variety
CHAMPION PETFOODS Morinville, Alberta (877) 939-0006 championpetfoods.com 	Self, in Canada	Ind. stores, online	Acana Classic: 9 Acana Regionals: 4 grain-free Acana Singles: 3 Orijen: 7 grain-free	Both Both Both Both	28% - 35% 10% - 24% 31% - 33% 17% 27% 15% 38% 16% - 20%	No	\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acana Classics varieties contain 55-65% meat; Acana Regionals contain 60% meat; Acana Singles contain 50% single-source animal protein • Only a single supplement is added to Acana Singles: zinc. They are complete and balanced without a vitamin/mineral premix • All Orijen varieties contain 80% meat


COMPANY INFO	MFR: SELF OR CO-PACK?	SALES LOCATIONS	VARIETIES, GRAIN-FREE?	MEAT, MEAL, OR BOTH?	PROTEIN RANGE FAT RANGE	RECALLS?	PRICE	NOTES
CHICKEN SOUP Cos Cob, CT (800) 658-0624 chickensoup.com	Co-pack	Ind. stores, select grocery, online	7	Both	21% - 30% 6% - 18%	No	\$\$	• Formerly licensed by Diamond, the brand is now independent and restored to the "Chicken Soup" rights-holder
DIAMOND Meta, MO (800) 977-8797 premiumedge petfood.com (800) 342-4808 professionalpet food.com (800) 977-8797 tasteofthewild petfood.com	Self	Ind. stores, online	Premium Edge: 6 Professional: 7 Taste of the Wild: 7 grain-free	Both Both Both	20% - 44% 8% - 15% 20% - 29% 8% - 20% 25% - 32% 15% - 18%	Yes: Salmonella in 2012	\$ \$ \$\$	• Premium Edge and Professional are lower-cost foods compared to many on this list, yet fresh meat is included in each formula • Taste of the Wild grain-free foods each contain multiple protein sources
DOGSWELL Los Angeles, CA (888) 559-8833 dogswell.com	Co-pack	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains (Petco)	Happy Hips: 1 Live Free: 6 grain-free Nutrisca: 3 grain-free Vitality: 1	Both Both Both	24% 12% 36% - 40% 14% - 18% 30% - 32% 16% - 18% 24% 12%	No	-\$ \$\$	• Happy Hips has high levels of glucosamine/chondroitin • Live Free and Nutrisca lines are grain-free, potato-free • Vitality is intended to help eyes, skin, coat
DR. GARY'S BEST BREED Findlay, OH (800) 500-5999 bestbreed.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, direct-shipped	15, 2 grain-free	Meals	21% - 32% 7% - 22%	No	\$\$	• Company claims products are GMO-free • Product line includes 6 specific breed foods
DR. TIM'S PET FOOD Marquette, MI (906) 249-8486 drtims.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	5, 1 grain-free	Meals	26% - 35% 16% - 25%	No	\$	• Company says all foods are low-ash, with high levels of quality fats a priority • All formulas contain porcine plasma (not our fave) as a protein source, but fairly low - 13th on the ingredients list
DRS. FOSTER & SMITH Rhineland, WI (800) 381-7179 drsfostersmith.com	Co-packed	Direct-shipped	5	Both	21% - 26% 8% - 14%	No	\$	• First ingredients, especially fresh meat, are great. Lower-cost ingredients start to appear 5th to 7th on list
EVANGER'S Wheeling, IL (847) 537-0102 evangersdogfood.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, direct-shipped	5, 2 grain-free	Both	24% - 33% 12% - 16%	No	\$	• Three formulas are chicken-free, for those looking for an alternative to this common ingredient
FARMINA (N&D) Colts Neck, NJ (732) 850-3693 usa.farmina.com	Self, in Italy	Ind. stores	N&D Ancestral Grain: 4 N&D Grain-Free: 6 grain-free	Fresh and dehydrated meats	28% - 35% 18% - 20% 37% - 42% 18% - 22%	No	\$\$\$	• Imported from Italy, made with EU-sourced ingredients • "Ancestral Grain" line uses organic spelt and oats • Grain-free line are high-protein, moderate fat foods


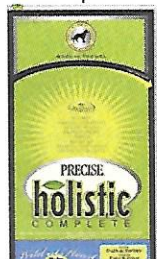




COMPANY INFO	MFR: SELF OR CO-PACK?	SALES LOCATIONS	VARIETIES, GRAIN-FREE?	MEAT, MEAL, OR BOTH?	PROTEIN RANGE FAT RANGE	RECALLS?	PRICE	NOTES
FIRSTMATE See Taplow Ventures								
FROMM FAMILY FOODS Mequon, WI (262) 242-2200 frommfamily.com 	Self	Ind. stores, online	Classics: 2 Four-Star Nutritionals: 11, 5 grain-free Gold: 7	Both Both Both	21% - 23% 11% - 15% 23% - 30% 11% - 19% 23% - 27% 10% - 18%	No	\$ \$\$ \$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classics line is made with chicken and chicken meal Four-Star line offers a wide variety of animal proteins Gold line is formulated so each product contains several animal proteins Complete nutrient analysis for each product on website
GRANDMA MAE'S New York, NY (888) 653-8021 grandmamaes.com	Co-pack	Ind. stores	7, 2 grain-free	4 varieties contain both; 3 contain meals only	23% - 30% 7% - 15%	No	\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sold only in independent stores in the midwest Senior variety includes dried chicken liver; a maximum of fat is also guaranteed in this variety
GREAT LIFE Simi Valley, CA (805) 577-9663 doctorsfinest.com 	Co-pack	Ind. stores, direct-shipped	Great Life: 7, 3 grain-free Dr. E's Limited Ingredient: 4, 2 grain-free Pioneer Naturals: 9, 4 grain-free	Meat and freeze-dried meat Meat and freeze-dried meat Meals and freeze-dried meats	22% - 30% 13% 19% - 27% 9.5% - 12% 20% - 30% 10% - 14%	No	\$\$-\$\$\$ \$ \$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the grain-free foods in each line are also potato-free Each variety of Great Life contains only one animal protein, helpful for feeding dogs with food allergies Lots of freeze-dried ingredients (including a few freeze dried meats) in these products
HALO Tampa, FL (800) 426-4256 halopets.com	Co-pack (company does not disclose location)	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains (Petco), direct-shipped, online	15, 4 grain-free	Meats only, with the exception of the vegan variety	20% - 30% 10% - 20%	No	\$\$-\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All varieties (except the vegan one) contain fresh meat and eggs Vegan variety should be used only for dogs with allergies to multiple animal proteins
HILL'S (IDEAL BALANCE) Topeka, KS (800) 445-5777 hillspet.com	Self	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains (Petco, Petsmart), online	14, 2 grain-free	Both	19% - 28% 11% - 19%	No	\$\$-\$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chicken is the first ingredient in 12 of these foods; lamb and salmon are 1st in the other 2) Chicken meal appears 5th or 6th on the ingredients list of all these foods
HI-TEK Dublin, GA (800) 284-4835 hitekration.com leonardpowell.com life4K9.com	Self Self Self	Ind. stores, online Ind. stores, online Ind. stores, online	Hi-Tek Naturals: 8, 3 grain-free Leonard Powell Signature: 6, 2 grain-free Life4K9: 2	Meals Both Both	21% - 35% 12% - 16% 24% - 28% 12% - 16% 21% 9%	No	\$ \$\$ \$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hi-Tek Naturals is lowest-cost line Leonard Powell Signature has two "classic" formulas, two baked formulas, and two with novel animal proteins Life4K9 line is baked, not extruded

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HORIZON Rosthern, SK (403) 279-5874 horizonpetfood.com	Self, in Canada	Ind. stores	Amicus: 3 grain-free Complete: 4 Legacy: 3 grain-free Pulsar: 2 grain-free	Both Both Both Meals	30% - 32% 10.5% - 18% 24% - 28% 10% - 14% 34% - 36% 14% - 18% 28% 15%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amicus foods are formulated for mini and small-breed dogs Complete is Horizon's only grain-based line, but still has a high animal protein inclusion (71%) Legacy line claims an 80% meat inclusion Pulsar line is made with peas and lentils (pulses)
IAMS HEALTHY NATURALS Dayton, OH (800) 675-3849 iams.com (Iams and all of Procter & Gamble's pet foods were sold in late 2014 to Mars, Inc., but no contact information changes have yet trickled down to the consumer level)	Self	Grocery, pet supply chains, ind. stores, online	5, 2 grain-free	Both	20% - 25% 10% - 14%	Yes, Salmonella in 2013	\$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the 6 foods in this line do NOT meet our selection criteria; the "Ocean Fish & Rice" variety contains "animal fat" A named meat appears first on 4 of the 5 remaining products; chicken is second to sorghum in the "Weight Management" variety Chicken meal appears 4th on the list of all these foods
KENT NUTRITION (BYNATURE) Muscatine, IA (877) 367-9225 bynaturepetfoods.com	Self	Ind. stores, online	9, 2 grain-free	5 contain both; 4 contain meals only	22% - 34% 12% - 20%	No	\$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh meat appears 5th or 6th on ingredients list of the foods that contain it (Puppy, Active, Large Breed, and both grain-free foods)
LOTUS Torrance, CA (888) 995-6887 lotuspetfoods.com	Co-pack, in Canada	Ind. stores, online	6, 2 grain-free	4 have both; meat only in the fish and senior foods	18% - 27% 8% - 16%	No	\$\$- \$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Lotus foods are baked, not extruded Complete nutrient analyses for all foods appear on Lotus website
MERRICK Amarillo, TX (800) 664-7387 merrickpetcare.com (800) 323-3353 feedgoodness.com	Self	Ind. stores, pet specialty (Petco), and online	Merrick: 16, 9 grain-free Whole Earth Farms: 4, 2 grain-free	Both Both	25% - 38% 8% - 17% 26% 12% - 13%	No	\$\$- \$\$\$ \$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merrick line is 60% animal proteins, 70% in the grain-free varieties Deboned meat is first ingredient in all Merrick line foods Whole Earth is Merrick's economy line
MIDWESTERN PET FOODS, INC. (EARTHORN) Evansville, IN (812) 867-7466 earthbornholisticpetfood.com	Self	Ind. stores, online	10, 6 grain-free	Meals	22% - 38% 12% - 20%	No	\$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company lists % of carbs in each food, helpful! Company has a "UPC for Trees" program; return the barcode from the label and it will plant a tree



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NATURA Fremont, NE (800) 532-7261 naturapet.com (Natura was purchased in early 2014 by Mars, Inc. So far, no changes in formulation or manufacturing have been observed.)	Self	Ind. stores Ind. stores Ind. stores Ind. stores, pet specialty (Petco, Petsmart, Pet Supplies Plus) Ind. stores, pet specialty	California Natural: 15, 6 grain-free Evo: 7 grain-free Health-Wise: 4 Innova: 14 Innova Nature's Table: 5 grain-free	Most utilize only meals; 3 contain both Both Meals Both, with one exception: Weight Mgt. food contains meat only Both	21% - 34% 7% - 16% 42% - 52% 15% - 22% 20% - 28% 7% - 18% 20% - 28% 7% - 16% 30% - 38% 16%	Yes; Salmonella in 2013	\$- \$\$ \$ \$ \$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> California Natural is the company's "limited ingredient" line, with just 4-6 major ingredients in each Evo line offers highest protein levels, with moderate fat levels Healthwise is the company's economy line Innova line has moderate protein and fat levels; it's also the only line sold in pet specialty chains. Nature's Table is new grain-free, potato-free line Complete nutrient analyses for every product appear on website.
NATURE'S SELECT Anaheim, CA (888) 814-7387 naturalpetfooddelivery.com	Co-packed	Direct-shipped, local distributors	7, 1 grain-free	All but one use meals; "Cold Water" variety contains meat only	22% - 33% 10% - 17%	No	\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability limited to areas with local distributors
NATURAL BALANCE Pacoima, CA (800) 829-4493 naturalbalanceinc.com (Del Monte Foods bought the company in early 2013.)	Self	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains (Petco), online	Alpha: 3 grain-free Limited Ingredient Diets (LID): 14, 11 grain-free Misc: 2 Ultra Premium: 6	Both Most have both; 4 contain meat only Misc. Both	26% 11.5% 20% - 22.5% 10% - 12% 18% - 26% 7.5% - 8% 18% - 28% 8% - 17%	Yes; Salmonella in May/June 2012	\$\$ \$ \$- \$ \$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alpha line uses multiple protein sources LID line limits the number of protein and carb sources in each food Misc. includes a vegetarian variety, and a "fat dogs" (lower fat) variety (made with meal). Ultra Premium line has higher protein and fat levels (except for "Reduced Calorie" variety)
NATURE'S VARIETY St. Louis, MO (888) 519-7387 naturessvariety.com 	Co-packed	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains (Petco), online	Instinct Kibble: 11 Instinct Kibble with Raw Boost: 9 Prairie: 8	Both; 2 also contain freeze-dried meat Meal, meat, and freeze-dried meat Both, except 2 puppy foods have meal only	22% - 38% 12% - 20% 22% - 38% 10.5% - 20.5% 22.5% - 26% 12% - 14%	No	\$- \$\$\$ \$\$\$ \$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instinct foods are all grain-free. Instinct line includes 4 "limited ingredient" foods and 2 "healthy weight" foods, which also contain freeze-dried meat Instinct Raw Boost line is kibble with freeze-dried meats included in formulas Prairie line contains whole grains; protein and fat levels are more moderate than Instinct line
NEWMAN'S OWN Aptos, CA (800) 865-2866 newmansownorganics.com	Co-packed (does not disclose location)	Ind. stores, fine grocery stores, online	2	Both	21% - 24% 10% - 12%	No	\$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major ingredients (except chicken and chicken meal, which are the sole animal proteins used) are organic

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NUTRO ULTRA Franklin, TN (800) 833-5330 ultraholistic.com	Self	Ind. stores, pet specialty (Petco, Petsmart)	12, 2 grain-free	Both	23% - 33% 10% - 17%	No	\$\$- \$\$\$	• Meat is 1st ingredient in each food, followed by chicken meal
OHIO PET FOODS (BLACKWOOD) Lisbon, OH (888) 843-1738 blackwoodpetfood.com	Self	Ind. stores, online	11, 3 grain-free	Meals	20.5% - 28% 9% - 17%	No	\$	• Blackwood foods are the manufacturer's "house brand," made in small batches
OVEN-BAKED TRADITION Saint-Hyacinthe, QE (888) 224-4140 ovenbakedtradition.com	Self, in Canada	Ind. stores	16, 4 grain-free	Both	20% - 34% 8% - 18%	No	\$\$	• All varieties are baked • Available only in Canada • This is the manufacturer's house brand
PARTY ANIMAL West Hollywood, CA (855) 727-8926 partyanimalpetfood.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, Whole Foods	1	Both	23% 14%	No	\$\$	• Only one variety offered: Organic chicken (with chicken meal), and several whole organic grains
PERFORMANCE PET (SPRING NATURALS) Mitchell, SD (866) 868-0874 springnaturals.com	Self	Ind. stores, online	12, 5 grain-free	Meat only	23.5% - 26% 11% - 17%	No	\$\$	• Each food contains meat (no meals used!) from a single animal species • This is the manufacturer's house brand
								
PETCUREAN Chilliwack, BC (866) 864-6112 petcurean.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	Go! : 8, 3 grain-free Now Fresh: 11 grain-free Summit: 4	Both Meat only Meal only	22% - 36% 12% - 18% 24% - 29% 10% - 18% 21% - 28% 8% - 17%	No	\$\$ \$\$- \$\$\$ \$	• Go! line has 3 types: "Fit + Free" (grain-free); "Sensitivity + Shine" (single protein); "Daily Defense" (single protein, no potato) • Summit is the lower-cost line, available only in Canada
PETGUARD Green Cove Springs, FL (800) 874-3221 petguard.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	3	1 contains meat; 1 contains both; 1 is vegetarian	16% - 27% 9% - 15%	No	\$\$- \$\$\$	• "Lifepath" is organic and contains meat; vegetarian food is also organic • "LifeSpan" contains chicken and chicken meal
PETS GLOBAL (ZIGNATURE) North Hollywood, CA (888) 897-7207 zignature.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	Zignature: 5 grain-free	Both	27% - 32% 14% - 18%	No	\$\$	• All formulas free of grain, potatoes, chicken, and chicken eggs • Each food has meat as 1st ingredient, then meat meal
PRECISE Nacogdoches, TX (888) 477-3247 precisepet.com	Self	Ind. stores	Precise Naturals: 9, 2 grain-free Precise Holistic Complete: 10, 3 grain-free	7 contain meal; grain-free varieties contain both 5 contain meal only; 5 contain both	23% - 30% 7% - 20% 23% - 32% 10% - 20%	No	\$- \$\$ \$\$	• This is the manufacturer's house brand • Precise Naturals line has been completely revamped and improved • Complete nutrient analyses for all foods appear on website
								

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PYRAMID (TUSCAN NATURAL) Las Vegas, NV (888) 408-0895 tuscannatural.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores	3, 1 grain-free	2 contain both; 1 has meal only	21% - 35% 11% - 20%	No	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Carne" is grain-free, high-protein and high-fat • Complete nutrient analyses for all foods appear on website
SMARTPAK CANINE Plymouth, MA (800) 461-8898 smartpak.com	Co-packed	Direct-shipped	5	Meal	21% - 24% 8% - 14%	No	\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh! This food can be ordered in custom pre-measured "portion paks" – individually sealed single servings for your dog
TAPLOW VENTURES (FIRSTMATE, KASIKS) North Vancouver, BC (800) 658-1166 firstmate.com	Self, in Canada	Ind. stores	Firstmate: 14, 9 grain-free Kasiks: 3 grain-free	Meals Meals	18% - 32% 6% - 20% 25% 12%	No	\$\$\$ \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firstmate's grain-free varieties use one animal protein, with high meat inclusions, and one carb • Kasiks is Taplow's new line of single-animal protein, grain-free foods made with legume carb sources and coconut, kale, and three berries as antioxidants 
THREE DOG BAKERY (BAKE TO NATURE) Kansas City, MO (800) 487-3287 threedog.com	Co-packed	Direct shipped, Three Dog Bakery stores	4	Both	18% - 26% 5% - 15%	No	\$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two adult, one puppy, and one weight management varieties available • All foods are baked
SOLID GOLD El Cajon, CA (800) 364-4863 solidgoldpet.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains (Petco), direct-shipped	9, 2 grain-free	Most contain both; 2 contain meal only	18% - 41% 9% - 20%	Yes; Salmonella in May 2012	\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest protein foods are the two grain-free varieties
TUFFY'S PET FOODS (NATURAL PLANET, NUTRISOURCE, PUREVITA) Perham, MN (800) 525-9155 naturalplanetorganics.com nutrisourcedogfood.com	Self	Ind. stores, direct shipped	Natural Planet: 4, 3 grain-free Nutri-source: 16, 5 grain-free PureVita: 6, 3 grain-free	Both Most use both; 4 contain meal only Both	23% - 25% 14% - 15% 22% - 32% 9% - 21% 24% - 26% 13% - 16%	No	\$ \$ \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 of the Natural Planet foods are organic • Each PureVita food has a single protein source (good for dogs with food allergies) • Complete nutrient analyses for all foods appear on website 
VERUS PET FOODS Abingdon, MD (888) 828-3787 veruspetchoods.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	8	Meals, except for 3 new varieties with both	17% - 26% 8% - 16%	No	\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VeRUS says it uses an exclusive 100% guaranteed non-China-sourced vitamin/mineral mix in its foods
VETS CHOICE (HEALTH EXTENSION) Melville, NY (800) 992-9738 vetschoice.com	Co-packed	Ind. stores, online	7, 3 grain-free	Both	24% - 27% 9% - 18%	No	\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All varieties contain fish oil, primrose oil, GAGs, colostrum, blue green algae, prebiotics, probiotics
VIAND Elmsford, NY (800) 743-1502 viandpet.com	Co-packed	Direct-shipped	3	Meals	18% - 26% 85 - 16%	No	\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company was formerly known as PHD

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WELLPET (HOLISTIC SELECT, WELLNESS) Tewksbury, MA (800) 225-0904 holisticselect.com wellnesspetfood.com	Co-packed and self	Ind. stores, pet specialty chains	Holistic Select: 13, 2 grain-free	Meals, except grain-free foods use both	21% - 32% 7.5% - 20%	No	\$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holistic Select line has "digestive health support" features
			Wellness Complete Health: 16	Both	21% - 30% 6% - 18%	Yes; Salmonella in May 2012	\$- \$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellness Complete Health has sub-lines of foods for toy, small, and large breeds, as well as foods for puppies and seniors
			Wellness Core: 7 grain-free	Both	33% - 36% 10% - 18%	No	\$-\$ \$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellness Core foods are all grain-free, and high in protein, with moderate fat levels
			Wellness Simple: 6, 4 grain-free	Both, except for duck variety with meat only	21% - 29% 8% - 14%	No	\$-\$ \$\$\$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellness Simple line are limited-ingredient diets with a single animal protein each



NEXT-LEVEL SELECTION CRITERIA

For some dog owners, a better dry dog food is just one more step on a journey to finding the healthiest diet in the world for their dogs. It's generally accepted among dog owners that this means a home-prepared diet comprised mostly of meat. Beyond this broad description, there isn't consensus. Opinions vary about the supremacy of raw vs. cooked, using raw bones or other sources of dietary calcium, what sort of fat source is ideal, whether it's advisable to include any grains or not (and if so, what kind and in what amounts), whether organic is healthier or not . . . Name any concept in nutrition; its value and application to dogs is being debated.

So it makes sense that even when one journeys from the lofty heights of home-prepared diets, back down to the kibbled valley floor, there is debate here, too. Keep in mind that (despite my tongue-in-cheek heights-and-valley metaphor) the vast majority of dogs in this country eat dry dog food, so there are even more opinions out there about kibble than any other type of dog food.

Now, stir in a lot of scientific data and medical opinions; there have been far more nutritional studies and feeding trials conducted on kibble than any other type of canine diet.

So, if you are one of the majority of dog owners who have chosen to feed kibble – but you are committed to finding and feeding the best possible kibble that exists – you will probably employ more than the basic selection criteria outlined on page 6. You may want to investigate some of the following aspects of dog-food formulation, ingredient sourcing, and manufacturing. Just keep in mind that the relative value of all of these lines of investigation, and anyone's ability to confirm the veracity of a company's answers, are debatable, as well.

IN-DEPTH QUESTIONS FOR DOG-FOOD COMPANIES:

Where do your ingredients come from – are any of them sourced from outside of the U.S.? Which ones: animal proteins and fats, oils, carb sources, herbs or other botanicals, vitamins and minerals? Which ingredients do you use that are so-called "human grade" (the legal term is "edible") before they arrive at your manufacturing facility? (Once an ingredient arrives at a pet-food plant, it can no longer be legally referred to as "edible" – which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to verify these claims.) Do you use any organic ingredients? What about genetically modified ingredients?

Where are your foods made? In your own plant, or are they made by a contract-manufacturer (also known as a co-packer)? What sort of certifications have been earned by the plant? If your products are co-packed, what sort of oversight does your company employ to ensure the ingredient sourcing and the manufacturing process are accomplished to your specifications?

What tests are employed in your manufacturing facility to ensure manufacturing accuracy and ingredient- and finished-product safety? Do you employ a "test and hold" system to prevent the release of products before test results have been returned? What tests are conducted, and how long are the products held before being released? If my dog has a health problem that my veterinarian thinks might be related to your food, or there is a recall of this food, who will I be able to speak to? What will your company do for me and my dog?

Be advised that some companies won't even have a person who will answer your call, or return your emailed inquiry – and that is a valuable selection criterion in itself!