

The Dog Food Project

The one best place to bury a good dog is in the heart of his master. - From the Portland Oregonian, Sept. 11, 1925. By Ben Hur Lampman



Grading kibble - easily?

I've received a few emails with similar content recently and would like to address this topic:

Dear Dog Food Project, I have recently found a "grading system" for dog kibble that is very handy. Could you include a link to it on your site please? I think it would help a lot of people to make even more sense of the hundreds of products out there.

I've looked at the list and would like to post a few comments about it. While the original author (whom I do not know) has good intentions and it does look like a good tool at first glance, after closer examination it's not very useful at all.

The biggest flaw is the "extra credit" section, since points of both sections are counted equally. You could basically have a so-so food that has minuscule amounts of a few "gimmick" ingredients thrown in to make the product list look more impressive on paper, but its quality is still not all that great and the food will end up with a fairly high ranking that it doesn't truly deserve. On the flip side, many products with simpler formulations will rank lower just because they only contain a small number of ingredients, even if they are of the highest quality. The grading list disregards the fact that not every dog does well on the same type of food and a "one size fits all" approach.

Let's go over the flawed points of the list:

1) For every listing of "by-product", subtract 10 points

While byproducts are something that you don't want to see in a quality kibble, I'd say that
 (a) unspecified byproducts (e.g. poultry byproducts) are far worse than specifically named ones (e.g. chicken byproducts) and
 (b) a food with byproducts as a main ingredient is far worse than one that has a specific meat meal as a main ingredient but lists some kind of byproduct as a lesser ingredient.

5) If the same grain ingredient is used 2 or more times in the first five ingredients (i.e. "ground brown rice", "brewer's rice", "rice flour" are all the same grain), subtract 5 points

While "splitting" is an issue, what people need to be concerned about is multiple **fractions** of the same type of grain (e.g. rice flour, ground rice and rice bran in the same food). There is nothing wrong with a food having both whole ground brown and white rice listed though, since you have the same ratio of meat to grain in a formulation regardless whether you use 500 pounds of white rice and 500 pounds of brown rice or 1,000 pound of just one of the two. They are nutritionally very similar, but brown rice contains a lot more fiber, which is not digestible, so depending on the goal of the food formulation a combination of brown and white rice is preferable.

8) If it contains ground corn or whole grain corn, subtract 3 points 9) If corn is listed in the top 5 ingredients, subtract 2 more points

Canine Nutrition Consulting

Due to current concerns about the food recall, 50% off basic consultations on canned and dry food!

Available options include recipes for home prepared diets, cooked and raw, individually designed and balanced for your dog, according to the newest nutritional guidelines of the [National Research Council \(2006\)](#).

Check out [BetterDogCare.com](#) and contact me today for a consultation.

General

[Main Page](#)

[About the Author](#)

[What Readers say](#)

[Dog Discussions Forum](#)

Commercial Dry Foods

[Introduction](#)

[Label Information 101](#)

[Identifying better products](#)

[Ingredients to avoid](#)

[Product List](#)

Specific Product Groups

[Organic Dog Food](#)

[Grain Free Dog Food](#)

[Vegetarian & Vegan Dog Food](#)

Articles

[Meat vs. Meat Meal **NEW!**](#)

[Choosing the right food](#)

[Feeding Puppies](#)

[Feeding Senior Dogs](#)

[Canine Obesity](#)

[Is too much protein harmful?](#)

[Grading kibble - easily?](#)

["Five Star Foods"](#)

Other Diet Topics

[Questions on Diet](#)

[Myths about Feeding](#)

[The Yuck Factor](#)

[Where the money goes](#)

[Natural Supplementation](#)

[Menadione \(Vitamin K3\)](#)

[Nutrient Requirements](#)

[Links & Resources](#)

Nutrition Primer

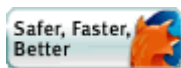
[Nutrient Overview](#)

[Water](#)

[Protein](#)

[Fat](#)

Carbohydrates
Fiber
Vitamins
Minerals
Essential Fatty Acids
Probiotics



First of all, there is no truth to the claim that corn is a "bad ingredient" per se. Unless an individual dog is sensitive or allergic to corn, it is no better and no worse than other cereal grains, as long as it is used as a source of carbohydrates and not as a main source of protein, especially in combination with excessive use of corn gluten meal as another main ingredient. If you'd like to see a comparison of nutrients in corn and rice, please click [here](#)

There are quality foods out there that do contain corn and many dogs do very well on them. What makes a difference is whether the manufacturer uses "feed grade" corn and/or corn fragments or quality USDA graded or organic corn. Personally I would choose a product that contains high quality corn over one that contains other, lower quality grains.

10) If the food contains any animal fat other than fish oil, subtract 2 points

As long as the fat used in the formula is a single-source product with a specific type of animal listed, there is nothing wrong with it. Generic "fish oil" or "fish meal" are just as questionable as generic "poultry fat" or "animal fat".

Chicken fat on the other hand is one of the most nutritious fats and high in linoleic acid. I would pick a food that contains chicken fat over any product that contains a non-specified source of vegetable oil, or soy or corn oil.

11) If lamb is the only animal protein source (unless your dog is allergic to other protein sources), subtract 2 points

There is no sensible reason to give a penalty to single-protein foods, not even if lamb is the only meat source. Lamb-only formulas used to be deficient in taurine (and some poor quality ones may still be), but manufacturers of quality products will fortify lamb based foods with a taurine supplement to guarantee sufficient amounts.

14) If it contains beef (unless you know that your dog isn't allergic to beef), subtract 1 point

If high quality beef is used, I once again have to say "there's nothing wrong with it". It's a good source of protein as long as an individual dog isn't intolerant. In fact, since many dogs are allergic either to chicken or to all poultry in general, it is a great alternative and deserves its place on the shelf among other protein sources.

15) If it contains salt, subtract 1 point

Amount is key here. Small amounts of salt are not necessarily a bad thing and AAFCO nutrient profiles prescribe that foods must contain a certain amount of sodium to meet trace mineral needs. Look where it's located on the ingredient list. I've recently seen a really nice food with some organic fruits and vegetables, "human grade" meats, a nice oil blend (olive, salmon and evening primrose) and many other appealing ingredients, but when I looked at the ingredient list closely, I saw that salt ranked higher on the list than eggs, yeast supplement and any of the fruits and veggies (listed: fresh whole garlic, fresh whole sweet peas, fresh whole sweet potatoes, fresh whole carrots, fresh whole green apples) - that is pretty scary. I would not feed this food regardless of the fact that it has a lot of other nice things going for it, which would probably get it a grade of A or A+ otherwise.

On to the bonus round:

3) If the food is baked not extruded, add 5 points

Pros: it is said (but not proven) that oven baked food is more digestible and does not expand in the stomach.

Cons: pet food that is oven baked can be processed at temperatures of 425 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, and for much longer time periods than the extrusion process takes. Modern manufacturing techniques allow for very low temperatures during the extrusion process. Oven baked kibble also tends to stick to the dog's teeth a lot worse than extruded dry food. Which one deserves "extra credit" is something you should decide after comparing the manufacturer's information on processing times and temperatures.

4) If the food contains probiotics, add 3 points

13) If it contains glucosamine and chondroitin, add 1 point

Once again, amount is key. Just because one or both of these supplements are present does not mean that sufficient amounts are included to actually have a therapeutic effect. With this grading list, product A with 100 ppm glucosamine would get the same bonus as product B with 400 ppm for example, which doesn't make much sense - and neither amount is going to provide a therapeutic dose, unless the dog were massively overfed on a daily basis. Targeted supplements given in addition to food, on an as-needed basis are a much better choice.

5) If the food contains fruit, add 3 points

6) If the food contains vegetables (NOT corn or other grains), add 3 points

Fruits and veggies are a nice addition to kibble, but by no means necessary. I do not agree with the idea that their presence could influence its grade by 6 points. This would mean that for example the 10-point penalty for containing generic "animal fat" gets reduced to a 4-point penalty just because the food has some dehydrated pieces of fruit and veggies added. Fresh, unprocessed fruits and veggies added to the kibble as "extras" have a much higher nutritional benefit.

8) If the food contains barley, add 2 points

10) If the food contains oats or oatmeal, add 1 point

12) For every different specific animal protein source (other than the first one; count "chicken" and "chicken meal" as only one protein source, but "chicken" and "turkey" as 2 different sources), add 1 point

There is no reason to favor barley over any other grain, and its absence is certainly not an issue. In cases where a dog is gluten intolerant, barley is especially unsuitable and rice or potatoes would be a much better source of carbohydrates. It also seems a little random that barley gives a product a higher bonus than oatmeal, they are equally nutritious. It would be smarter to determine if one or the other is better tolerated by the individual dog.

In addition to that, the inclusion of multiple protein and grain sources isn't necessarily always of benefit either, too many dogs are sensitive or allergic to too many things and the more ingredients a formulation contains, the higher the chance that a particular dog will have issues with it. I'm more in favor of simple formulations with less ingredients and adding fresh "extras" that are less processed.

- 9) If the food contains flax seed oil (not just the seeds), add 2 points**
11) If the food contains sunflower oil, add 1 point

Sunflower oil and flax seed and flax oil are nice ingredients, but there is no real reason that their inclusion in a particular formula would make the food better than others. Avocado oil, hemp oil, walnut oil etc. are of equally high quality but are not mentioned in this grading list at all.

I do understand that everyone wants what is best for their dog, but using this kind of arbitrary grading system that puts more importance into foods that look good on paper and want to be all things to all people is very likely to misguide dog owners in their quest to find a better product.

Last updated 7/28/08 4:56pm, © Sabine Contreras 2004-2009. This website is a Strange World production. [Want one like it](#)