

The real cost of dry pet food!

What are you really paying for? If you know more about what's really in those well-marketed bags of dry food, we think you'll be more likely to add fresh foods to your animal's diet.

How much does it cost to produce pet foods?

Most premium dog and cat foods sell for \$1 – 2.00 per pound. The example below gives a detailed breakdown of a “healthy” dry food that retails for \$1.50 per pound.

	per pound	20 pound bag
You pay	\$1.50	\$30.00
retailer profit margin	25%	25%
retailer pays	\$1.13	\$22.50
distributor profit margin	22%	22%
total distributor cost	\$0.88	\$17.55
		\$
freight to distributor	0.06	\$1.20
manufacturer sales price	\$0.82	\$16.35
manufacturer profit margin	50%	50%
manufacturer cost	\$0.41	\$8.18
cost of bag, processing, pallet, taping	0.12	\$2.40
ingredient cost	\$0.29	\$5.78

A manufacturer sells products to a distributor. The distributor warehouses and delivers the product to retail stores. Profit margin is the percentage profit on the sale price. For example, if a store sells a product for \$1.00 and makes 35¢, their margin is 35%.

If you pay \$1.50 per pound for dry dog food

The manufacturer has paid 29 cents per pound for ingredients

Blueberries and yucca

Educated shoppers want to share the health benefits of foods like blueberries, apples and glucosamine with their pets. When they see “Dried Carrots, Whole Sweet Potatoes, Whole Apples, Whole Blueberries, Whole Clove Garlic” on a label, most people assume that there is enough in the recipe to be of benefit, but this is unlikely. Expensive ingredients are rarely added in sufficient quantity to be of use.

The costs for an actual recipe for a “healthy” dog food.

This recipe includes yucca, a popular ingredient that may benefit digestion. “Contains Yucca” is prominently advertised on the front of the bag.

CHICKEN MEAL	30.4%	\$0.26
• CRACKED BARLEY	26.4%	\$0.13
• BREWERS RICE	26.4%	\$0.09
• POULTRY FAT	10.3%	\$0.23
• DIGEST	3.00%	\$0.47
• TOMATO POMACE	2.4%	\$0.09
• POTASSIUM CHLORIDE	0.44%	\$0.10

• SALT	0.25%	\$0.03
• VITAMIN MIX	0.10%	\$4.50
• MINERAL MIX	0.10%	\$0.93
• YEAST	0.10%	\$1.90
• CHOLINE CHLORIDE	0.15%	\$0.48
• NATURAL PRESERVATIVES	0.04%	\$18.36
• YUCCA SCHIDIGERA	0.01%	\$5.35

Yucca is listed as .01% of the food. That's one pound of Yucca for every 10,000 pounds of food. If you feed your dog 2 cups of food a day, she will consume 0.03 grams (0.0008 oz) of yucca daily.

That amount is smaller than a grain of salt! We don't think it's enough to be of much use.

Now, some practice making sense of the ingredient list on a label.

If you want to feed your dog blueberries and yucca, it's best to add them yourself: here's why:

Ingredients in pet foods are listed in order by weight. If two or more ingredients are used in the same amounts, the manufacturer can choose the order in which to list the ingredients. For example, in the recipe below, there may be the same amount of rice as lamb

A typical "high end" dry food:

Lamb, Lamb meal, White Fish, Ground Brown Rice, Ground Barley, Oatmeal, Rye Flour, Ground Millet, Amaranth, Flax Seed, Canola Oil (preserved with Rosemary, Vitamin C and E), Dried Peas, Dried Carrots, Whole Sweet Potatoes, Whole Apples, Whole Blueberries, Whole Clove Garlic, Alfalfa Leaf, Yucca Shidigera, Probiotics (listed individually) Prebiotics (Inulin, Fructose), Shark Cartilage, Glucosamine, Chondroitin Sulfate, (vitamin mix

There are lots of fruits and vegetables listed in this "healthy" dry food, as well as some therapeutic nutrients (shark cartilage and glucosamine), and it looks great. However, they are listed after Canola Oil, in descending order. How much of each of these ingredients is likely to be in a pound of food? Not much, when it's so far down the label.

Glucosamine, Chondroitin and other nutraceutical additions are heavily promoted, in brochures and on bags, but you won't often find a listing for how much of a "therapeutic" ingredient is included. Consumers assume that there is enough to help their animal. Amounts are rarely at a therapeutic level, except in prescription diets. These ingredients are expensive, as we discussed earlier

A "super- premium" dry food:

Ingredients:
 Chicken, turkey, chicken meal, turkey meal, whole grain brown rice, whole grain white rice, oatmeal, potatoes, cracked pearled barley, millet, chicken fat (preserved with mixed tocopherols), duck, salmon, egg product, flaxseed, natural chicken flavor, kelp, potassium chloride, salt, choline chloride, chicory root extract, carrots, peas, apples, dried skim milk, cranberry powder, rosemary extract, parsley flake.
 Vitamins and minerals.

The carrots, peas and apples in this example come AFTER the salt and the chicory root extract! Steve once formulated a food with chicory root extract. The manufacturer of the extract suggested using it at the 0.1% level, or one pound for every thousand pounds! That's about what we expect you'll find with the carrots, peas and apple in this food.

Does the benefit of that tiny amount of blueberry or yucca survives the manufacturing process?

The whole mix takes a beating through the high temperature, high pressure-cooking, drying, and processing necessary to make a product with a long shelf life. Dry dog and cat foods are among the most heavily processed foods available.

Add fresh fruits and vegetables to your animal's food to help them live longer, healthier lives!

A 2002 study by Waltham researchers published in the Journal of Nutrition showed that dietary antioxidants protected against DNA damage in adult dogs (1) They used a blend of vitamin C (not considered to be essential for dogs), vitamin E, taurine, lutein, lycopene and B-carotene. In 2004 a group of researchers reported in Neurobiology of Aging (2) that the learning ability in aged beagle dogs is preserved by behavioral enrichment and dietary fortification. In this case, the researchers used a blend of vitamin E, alpha-lipoic acid, vitamin C, and spinach flakes, tomato pomace, grape pomace, carrot granules and citrus pulp.

Fresh foods are best!

You can add up to 15% real food to dry food without upsetting the balance of important nutrients. Add a broccoli stalk (juice it first); add Brazil nuts; and read *See Spot Live Longer* for more suggestions. If your dog needs glucosamine, add it directly to her food, in sufficient quantities that it will be therapeutic. If you want your dogs to have blueberries – great food for dogs – give them some fresh blueberries!

We think we'll do much better for our animals by adding some of those terrific, healthy foods the simplest way possible: share yours!.

1 Paul Heaton et al "Role of Dietary Antioxidants to Protect against DNA Damage in Adult Dog." Journal of Nutrition, 132, 1720S-1724S. 2002.

2 N.W. Milgram, E. Head, et al "Learning ability in aged beagle dogs is preserved by behavioral enrichment and dietary fortification: a two-year longitudinal study." *Neurobiology of Aging* 26, 77-90. 2005.

© Steve Brown and Beth Taylor
See Spot Live Longer

See *Spot Live Longer* is available from www.naturalpetproductions.net