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The Truth About Labelling

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Over the years many have misunderstood the role of labels on pet food.

Many believe that these labels adequately, if not accurately, portray the quality of food overall and the relative amounts of important ingredients in the package. This is wrong.

Names, descriptions, ingredient lists, nutrition percentages and not to mention pictures all portend to represent important information about the food. Bird handlers, bird breeders, magazine editors, store owners, even avian veterinarians have at times made misleading, and probably unknowingly naive and harmful statements in regards to this subject.

So let us look at some real scientific research and interview those who are experts in the field to see what their conclusions are.

FACT: Although pet food labels tell very little about the products in the package, they are still “legal”. In fact if you look at the *American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO)* own web site it states: “Today, pet food labeling is done by the honor system”.

Others have taken note like the *World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA)* who stated at their meeting in Vancouver in 2001:

“Many labels currently do not provide easily accessible information about nutrient content, caloric density, quality and identity of ingredients (including slaughter practices and presence of GMOs), bioavailability of nutrients, standards of nutritional adequacy, freshness and stability, and, something not touched on yet in this discussion, quality assurance practices in manufacturing. Until such time that the labeling laws are modified in a way that is not misleading, the burden will be on the veterinarian and the informed consumer to investigate the nutritional claims made by any given pet food.”

FACT: Scientific studies clearly show that the statement from the WSAVA that “...the burden will be on... the informed consumer to investigate the nutritional claims made by any given pet food”, could not be more accurate.

A comparison of confirmed nutrients by *Michigan State University's Comparative Nutrition Laboratory* in commercially prepared foods for birds (pellets and extrusions) from eight different manufacturers resulted in 9 out of 18 of them being found present in concentrations that are sufficient to produce clinical signs of ill health.

There are too many variations, loopholes and misleading, if not devious, methods of labeling pet foods for the consumer or veterinary care practitioner to make any useful conclusion from a bird food label.



Proper formulation of manufactured foods must consider individual raw ingredients, growing and processing conditions, manufacturing conditions, storage conditions, feeding protocols, packaging and distribution issues, and many others. It is imperative that the nutrient specifications of commercial formulated diets be carefully reviewed **and confirmed** before they are used.

If this information is not available upon request from the manufacturer, choose another product.