

What labels don't say

A recent study indicates a difference between pet food labels and the meat in the tin, but it misunderstands how we label our petfoods, says industry body the PFMA.

The Pet Food Manufacturers' Association has responded to a University of Nottingham study that seemed to find a mismatch between pet food labels and the animal DNA in the food. The study's researchers DNA tested 17 pet foods readily available in supermarkets and found 14 of them to contain animal proteins not identified on the label. No horse DNA was found in any of the samples.

The PFMA says "We very much welcome this study and the opportunity to talk about pet food labelling, as it highlights a common and very reasonable misunderstanding of how

pet food labelling legislation works.

"The pet food industry is strictly regulated by more than 50 pieces of legislation including animal byproducts regulations which govern what ingredients can be used in pet foods and also states that all animal based materials must come from animals slaughtered under veterinary supervision."

EU rules stipulate what information must be on the packet and how it should be conveyed. Some of the terminology is directed at the farmer more than the pet owner, but the PFMA acknowledges the system has some safeguards built in. For

example: "None of the products that claim to have a single source protein should be found to have multiple sources present."

Recent PFMA research among 2100 pet owners and 150 veterinary professionals indicates a high level of confidence in the pet food industry. 70% of owners and 85% of vets agree that commercially prepared pet food provides optimum nutrition, and almost 60% of owners and 95% of vets would go as far as to say pets are living longer as a result of advanced nutrition.

A guide to understanding pet labels is on www.pfma.org.uk

Why pet food labelling may not be as it seems

- If a label indicates that 4% of a particular animal protein is present, this is a minimum figure. A higher level of that protein may well be present.

- Under EU rules, a pet food manufacturer can choose to list specific ingredients, or list them by a category such as 'meat and animal derivatives.'

- The latter method is attractive to an industry that uses byproducts of human food manufacture because supply levels of these raw materials vary throughout the year. Producers may choose to substitute equally nutritious ingredients that are in plentiful supply, without having to make expensive changes to packaging.

