Labels Do Matter

1. **The name of the product**—If it is called a “dinner,” “entrée,” “recipe,” or “formula,” it may have many more ingredients than those listed in the name. A “Beef and Rice Dinner” for dogs, for example, may contain several additional ingredients; beef and rice need comprise only 25 percent of the food.

2. **Feeding recommendations**—These can be used as a starting point, but watch your dog for signs that you may need to feed less or more food than is recommended to maintain optimal body condition.

3. **Other information**—Instructions, wellness statements, and designations such as “senior” are neither required nor prohibited. Such information is usually of little significance in choosing a pet food.

4. **The ingredients list**—Ingredients must be listed in order of decreasing amount in the food, so look for animal source ingredients at or near the top.

5. **Guaranteed analysis**—This lists the minimum concentration of protein and fat and the maximum amount of water and fiber in the food. While of interest to veterinary nutritionists, it has little meaning for most consumers.

6. **The nutritional guarantee**—Make sure the food is guaranteed to meet the nutritional needs of your pet and has been shown to do this by AAFCO–approved methods.

7. **Contact information for the maker or distributor of the food**—Should there be a problem, you may want to contact the company for information.