



AAFCO: The People Behind Animal Feed and Pet Food

First, and let us say this most emphatically, Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) does not regulate or inspect anything. We cannot. We are not a government agency. We are a group whose members are government agencies representing the 50 states, Canada, and the federal government (US Food and Drug Administration, Center of Veterinary Medicine; FDA CVM).

Second, AAFCO is very transparent in its processes. We are a deliberative body, and we take time to move through issues so all affected parties can comment.

Third, companies in the business of manufacturing animal feed and pet food generally know about AAFCO, FDA CVM, and state government and how each of these organizations participates in the regulation of animal feed and pet food.

- If you are new to the business of animal feed or pet food, please visit [aafco.org](https://www.aafco.org) to learn more.
- If you are a consumer with a question about pet food, please visit these AAFCO resources:
 - <https://petfood.aafco.org/>
 - <https://talkspetfood.aafco.org/>

You will find links to a lot of good information at <https://www.aafco.org/Consumers>, so be sure to check it out if you have questions.

Fourth, if your company is interested in marketing a new ingredient for pet food or animal feed, please visit <https://www.aafco.org/Regulatory> and complete the form to begin the process. You might also want to visit <https://www.aafco.org/Publications> to learn more about your options for purchasing the AAFCO *Official Publication*.

A Few Basics About AAFCO

In the world of commercial animal feed, including pet food, three agencies work cooperatively to recognize the ingredients that are used to manufacture feed and the state laws that regulate commerce in animal feed and pet food among the 50 states. These three agencies are

- AAFCO,
- FDA CVM, and
- your state government.

All three teams work together cooperatively in several areas that support the recognition of ingredients and the language found in state laws. In this article, we give you information on AAFCO's contribution to these very important aspects.

To understand the role that each agency plays in the safety of animal feed, here are links to areas where you can learn more about our cooperating partners:

- FDA: <https://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/Products/AnimalFoodFeeds/IngredientsAdditives/default.htm>
- State government information: <https://www.aafco.org/Regulatory/State-Information>

AAFCO's Model Bill and Regulations

Our organization started in 1909. Even in those days, there was a realization that harmonizing the laws that govern the flow of animal feed and pet food between states would keep the flow of commerce functioning. These forward-looking people started AAFCO, and one of their first projects was to

begin to draft model or sample regulations that each state could adopt on its own, in whatever language fit its needs, so that interstate commerce could flow without interruption.

AAFCO continues this heritage of maintaining model bills and regulations for our member states to consider when it is time to update state feed laws. One recent example of a reason to update a state's feed laws is the enactment of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) that was signed into law during the Obama administration. We save states thousands of dollars and countless man hours because we draft model regulations for the states to use to meet their needs, knowing that their neighbors in states nearby are using similar language so that interstate commerce will continue.

Each state, as well as the federal government, acts through a congress or legislative body to enact laws. The animal feed laws enacted in every state (except Alaska, which has no commercial feed law) are no different. Any constituent may petition their legislature to adopt or change provisions establishing and monitoring the commerce associated with animal food distribution. This process must be passed by the consensus of the voting members of the federal or state legislature and signed into law by the president or state governor.

Once this happens, an agency within the federal or state government is assigned to administer those provisions. Often, official rules will need to be adopted to further clarify or explain the provisions of the law. On the federal level as well as with every state, rules must be adopted through a prescribed process. Plenty of public input must be sought, and acceptable time limits for pertinent input must be allowed. For states, having model rules through AAFCO allows for a template for each state to use when needing to adopt rules.

When feed laws were first adopted, the expertise rested in the land grant colleges' agricultural experiment stations. In some states, the only chemical laboratory available to the state at that time was at these institutions. Some states have maintained that working relationship and still reside as departments of the land grant university. While that may seem contrary to state government, it is exactly the op-

posite. None of these agencies receive funds from the university, but they may return surplus funds to the university for pertinent agricultural research. Also, this arrangement places the regulatory function near the academia sections in animal sciences, thus making a team to best protect our food supply with well-designed regulations.

Another common feature of animal feed programs is that they are usually partially funded or totally funded through the collection of user fees. This means that general tax dollars are reduced or eliminated for regulating feeds. Although not taxes, inspection fees may be prescribed by law that mandates feed distributors to file distribution reports and base fees accordingly. A complete listing of those provisions is found on the AAFCO website under "Regulatory."

Ingredients in Animal Feed and Pet Food

If you think you can use any ingredient you want in an animal feed or pet food, you are wrong. Some very dedicated people in your state government have been working on animal feed and pet food ingredient definitions with these outcomes very clearly in focus:

- Diet appropriate for the animal species that will eat the food
- Safety of the ingredients in the animal feed or pet food—we rely on scientific research to validate this
- A level playing field through common language in laws in each US state

Here are some assumptions we may share:

- We assume that bags or cans of our livestock feed or pet food will be available at our local retail outlet.
- The beef, chicken, or other animal protein we purchase for our family's dinner comes from animals that have been fed an appropriate diet and that this nutritionally adequate diet has been checked for safety for the animals and for humans.

- The animal feed and pet food that is available for purchase in one state is likewise available in other states, nearby and nationally, due to common language in laws in each US state.

How does this happen? What goes on behind the scenes to ensure that the animal feed or pet food is safe for its intended use and for its intended species? AAFCO's ingredient definitions process is what goes on behind the scenes, and it has been going on for almost 100 years.

AAFCO's science-based approach mandates that scientific studies to validate the use of an ingredient in animal feed or pet food have been completed to the satisfaction of AAFCO. We often use an approach we call "expert panels" to examine the body of research submitted to AAFCO in support of a new ingredient proposed for the marketplace. With an expert panel, we include scientists, academia, veterinarians, and other experts in animal nutrition and safety to ensure that the chemicals in the proposed ingredient provide the necessary nutrition to the intended species. In other words, we ask our expert panel to make sure the ingredient does what it is intended to do in the animal. If it does not, it cannot be legally used in animal feed or pet food in the United States.

Our process of defining a new ingredient takes at least two years from start to finish. During this time, our members, representatives from FDA CVM, and other scientists are involved in discussions and analysis to make sure the ingredient is well understood. We often say that AAFCO is a deliberative body, and we mean it! We do not want any harm from an ingredient to come to a person or to an animal, so we are very thorough, and we take our time to get it right.

Your State is Your Starting Point

When you know what to look for in your state laws and take the time to talk with your state regulatory officials, you quickly get a picture of people who are very well educated in their fields and very dedicated to you, the safety of your animals and pets, and the system of laws AAFCO has been working on cooperatively with your state since 1909. This is a positive picture with a cast of some pretty good people. We hope you check it out for yourself.

Many times, people think that FDA CVM or AAFCO can answer questions about their state laws. FDA CVM and AAFCO cannot answer questions about individual state laws. The process your state follows to enact laws or to revise laws is unique to your state. Please reach out to your state officials through the information in this link: <https://www.aaftco.org/Regulatory/State-Information>.

Your Role in Feeding Your Animals

As the owner of animals, whether it be livestock, pets, or specialty pets, selecting the right feed for your animals is up to you. We have shared a brief explanation of the role of AAFCO, offered you links to FDA CVM for information on the US federal government's role, and briefly explained how your state government handles animal feed and pet food laws.

AAFCO's interest is in the health of the animal. Appropriate nutrition has long been recognized as the key to healthy animals. We have dedicated and knowledgeable volunteer members from state government with the background in regulatory science and veterinary medicine working cooperatively on our areas of specialty. We hope you now have a greater understanding of how animal feed and pet food products are recognized.



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