



AAFCO: The People Behind Animal Feed and Pet Food

AAFCO is a private non-profit corporation featuring:

- A process for defining ingredients used in animal feed and pet food.
- A forum where state agencies, federal agencies, and industry develop uniform language that states may adopt or reference in laws.
- Two meetings per year that include specialized trainings for members and industry.

If your company is interested in offering a new ingredient for pet food or animal feed in the US, the AAFCO Ingredient Definition Process is your starting point. Please visit this page: <https://www.aafco.org/Regulatory> and complete the form to begin the process before your safety studies begin.

- European Union (EU) or other country definitions are not recognized or legal in the US. However, it is possible that the US has already defined the same or a similar ingredient – check Chapter 6 of our *Official Publication*.
- Ingredients approved for US human food GRAS are not automatically approved for US animal feed/pet food GRAS.

AAFCO *Official Publication* is printed annually in October. The online version is updated twice each year and includes a link to our Online Database of Ingredients (ODI) for you to do fast ingredient verification and label review. Use the AAFCO *Official Publication* for:

- Approved US animal feed and pet food ingredient definitions.
- Current pet food and animal feed labeling requirements.
- Model guidance documents and model bill and regulations that may be adopted by states as state laws.

- Committee members and industry advisers to AAFCO committees.

Visit <https://www.aafco.org/Publications> to learn more about your options to subscribe annually to the AAFCO *Official Publication* and the Online Database of Ingredients (ODI).

Here are some links to helpful resources if you are new to the business of animal feed/pet food, you are an international ingredient manufacturer, or you are a consumer interested in learning more about animal feed/pet food:

- If you are new to the business of animal feed or pet food, please visit www.aafco.org/Industry to learn more. The three most common questions we get from industry (and quick responses) are:
 - What is the AAFCO Ingredient Definitions Process? (Quick response: See Chapter 6 of our *Official Publication*)
 - Is my company's ingredient already defined? (Quick response: See Chapter 6 of our *Official Publication*)
 - Can I attend the next AAFCO meeting? (Quick response: Yes, [check our website](#) for registration dates and details)
- If you are a consumer with a question about pet food, please visit these AAFCO resources:
 - <https://petfood.aafco.org/>
 - <https://talkspetfood.aafco.org/>
 - <https://www.aafco.org/Consumers>

Safety Is the #1 Concern

In the world of commercial animal feed and pet food, the safety of the ingredients for the intended use in the intended species is our primary concern. It is the responsibility of industry, or the company developing

the ingredient, to establish the safety of the ingredient. This is accomplished through scientific studies, possibly including feeding trials.

There are three groups working cooperatively to define ingredients that are used to manufacture feed. These three agencies are:

- Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) – AAFCO Ingredient Definition Process.
- US Food and Drug Administration, Center of Veterinary Medicine (FDA CVM) – **Food Additive Petitions (FAP)** and **Independent Conclusions of GRAS (ICG)**, both of which are published in the *AAFCO Official Publication*.
- **State government** through referencing or adopting the *AAFCO Official Publication* in state law.

Uniform Laws Keep Products Moving Between States

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 interstate 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 fits its needs, so 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 or FSMA that was signed into law during the Obama administration. We save states thousands of dollars and countless man hours because our collaborative group of state and federal regulators, along with industry representatives, drafts model regulations for the states to use to meet their needs, knowing that their neighbors in states nearby are using similar language so 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 by the state 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 allowable 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 college's 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 universities. While that may seem contrary to state government, it is exactly opposite. None of these agencies receive funds from the university but 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 like tonnage fees or licensing fees paid by the companies shipping products into a state. This means that general tax dollars are reduced or eliminated to regulate feeds. While not taxes, inspection fees that mandate feed distributors file distribution reports may be prescribed by law. A complete listing of those provisions may be found on the AAFCO website under the heading of "Regulatory."

Importance of Ingredient Definitions in Animal Feed and Pet Food

If you think you can use any ingredient you choose 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.

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- 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's 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 this nutritionally adequate diet has been checked for safety for the animals and for us as humans.
- The animal feed and pet food that is available for purchase in one state is usually 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 validate the use of an ingredient in animal feed or pet food, and that these scientific studies have been completed to the satisfaction of AAFCO's body of subject matter experts and FDA CVM. 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 intended 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 US.

Our process to define a new ingredient takes at least 2 years from start to finish. During this time, our members, representatives from FDA CVM, and other scien-

tists 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, when you 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 at this link: <https://www.aafco.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 consumer protection, which we approach through the health of the animal. Appropriate nutrition has long been recognized as the key to healthy animals and healthy people. 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.

