

**ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN FEED CONTROL OFFICIALS (AAFCO)
1800 SOUTH OAK STREET, SUITE 100
CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS**

**MINUTES OF THE PET FOOD COMMITTEE MIDYEAR MEETING
HELD AT THE NEW ORLEANS MARRIOTT
555 CANAL STREET
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
JANUARY 21, 2026, 1:30 P.M. CT**

MEMBERS:

Lizette Beckman
Holly Jewell
Lorey Bell-Grady
Kelsi Brown
Charlotte Conway
Karen Donnelly
James Embry
Kristen Green
Justin Hill
Rachel Kohne
Tiffany Leschishin
JoLynn Otero
Barbara-jean Schliecher
Katie Simpson
Kim Truett
Whitney Williams

ADVISORS:

Cathy Alinovi
Bill Bookout
Berit Foss
Jennifer Gornert
Pam Kaufman
Chris Nash
Charles Starkey
Louise Calderwood
Angele Thompson
Pat Tovey
Renee Streeter

AAFCO:

Austin Therrell Executive Director
Jennifer Roland NASDA

GUESTS:

Dr. Claire Timlin Director of Research and Development, Four Rivers Kennels
Eric Johnson Recording Secretary, Minutes Solutions Inc. (via teleconference)

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

There being a quorum present, and adequate and proper notice of the meeting having been given, the meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL, WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Holly Jewell welcomed attendees and conducted a roll call of Pet Food Committee (PFC) members.

3. **SENIOR LIFE STAGE NUTRITION PROFILE PRESENTATION**

A presentation by Dr. Claire Timlin preceded a discussion focusing on pet food for senior age pets and whether AAFCO should pursue a nutritional profile for pets that have reached the later stage of life, specifically for a senior life stage.

3.1 **Dr. Claire Timlin Presentation**

Dr. Claire Timlin, Director of Research and Development at Four Rivers Kennels, delivered a presentation entitled Considerations for Senior Specific Nutritional Profiles. For background, it was noted that Dr. Claire Timlin has overseen various contract and independent research projects focusing on canine health, and nutrition. She formerly worked in the area of bovine reproduction research.

Dr. Claire Timlin noted that Four Rivers conducts testing for the pet food industry. Tests focus on functional ingredients and utilize a group of Labrador retrievers for research. Four Rivers has experience with all ages including older canines, as it utilizes each animal for its entire lifespan.

The presentation focused on why AAFCO might want to consider adding a nutritional profile to pet food ingredients for senior companion animals and led to a PFC discussion on whether to establish a workgroup to investigate this area. AAFCO currently sets standards based on two life stages: the growth and reproduction stage; and the adult maintenance stage. The standards are about 20 years old and based on past studies. AAFCO currently does not provide nutritional requirements for pets at the senior life stage.

In the years since these standards were set, Dr. Claire Timlin reported the functions of companion dogs have broadened. Today, pets are more like family members. A 2005 study found that about one-third of all pets were seniors, underscoring what has been called a senior boom for the pet industry. Thus, pet food makers are now more geared toward immune system support, supplements, and other ingredients catering to older pets. The senior pet products being marketed to consumers vary in terms of types and levels of ingredients, such as crude protein, and life stage definitions, with some labels defining seniors as more than seven years old and others using the term “mature.”

Aging animals and humans lose robustness and resilience to rebound from stress. Aging is driven by cellular changes that affect muscles. Described were related factors such as mitochondrial dysfunction and muscle tissue changes that prevent muscles from responding as they did in youth. In canines, aging leads to a decrease in muscle mass and weight. Lean muscle decline can be found at ages between 50% and 90% of a canine's life span. Dr. Claire Timlin displayed graphs showing a rapid decrease in muscle mass after 75% of a lifespan. Also reviewed was the physiology of senior animals in terms of cognitive changes, hormonal changes, and alterations in metabolism.

Dr. Claire Timlin noted that animal owners may provide older pets with the same kind of food given when they were younger and thus not account for changes brought about by aging. Also noted was an increased prevalence of disease among older animals that often goes unnoticed during standard veterinary checkups. Thus, the need for an animal to receive more protein or calories may not be apparent to a pet owner.

Displayed was a table showing the differences in amino acid level recommendations posted by Four Rivers Kennels, the NRC (minimum and maximum), AAFCO, and the European Pet Food Industry Federation. Dr. Claire Timlin said a comparison of these levels shows that AAFCO seems to be covering its bases on amino acids. Also displayed were graphs showing that studies comparing young adults and senior animals have focused on lean mass, arginine, and valine levels.

Also described were studies of young and old adult dogs that were fed increased levels of nitrogen to observe how nitrogen balance affects cellular protein content. Not much difference was found in terms of synthesizing proteins, so the study concluded that there was no need for nutritional adjustments.

The studies to date have raised questions about how to define the “senior” stage of an animal’s life. Longevity varies from breed to breed, with chihuahuas living much longer than Great Danes. The American Animal Hospital Association considers an animal to be at the senior stage once it has reached the last 25% of its lifespan. The association places adult dogs in three categories: young adults, which is three or four years old for most breeds; mature adult; and seniors, which means no more than 25% of a lifespan yet remains.

Dr. Claire Timlin noted that these factors raise the question of the nutritional needs of an animal in later life. It was suggested that perhaps precision formulations can be improved and protein content can be changed to improve conditions for older animals.

The wide variety of animal breeds, sizes and aging differences could make the task of seeking nutritional standards too complicated. Thus, a broad approach to the issue may be prudent. For example, more study is needed in the area of vitamins for older dogs. Currently, dog food makers promote vitamins such as vitamin E and vitamin C as needed by senior animals. Senior animals also may benefit from increased fiber intake, calorie adjustments, and taking into account macro-nutritional balance.

Dr. Claire Timlin concluded that the pet food industry is already giving special attention to senior animals, as they are physiologically different than younger animals. Thus, the question is whether it is worth considering ingredient standards for older animals.

3.2 Audience Discussion

One member of the audience addressed Dr. Claire Timlin by noting that researchers usually do not look at protein requirements for senior animals based on lean body mass.

In response, Dr. Claire Timlin agreed that lean body mass is usually not considered but that she anticipates that an animal’s whole-body weight will be about the same as its lean mass as the animal ages.

3.3 Nutritional Profile for Seniors Workgroup

On a motion made by Charlotte Conway, seconded by Kristen Green, it was resolved to stand up a workgroup to review the expressed interest in establishing a nutritional profile for senior pets including dogs and cats. Motion carried.

Charlotte Conway is to take the lead for the workgroup. Those interested in joining were asked to contact her.

The motion followed a discussion about the basis for, and goals of a workgroup tasked with exploring the feasibility and potential for additional nutritional profiles for pets within the framework of the four questions set by AAFCO for workgroups. Cat food as well as dog food would be considered.

Questions were raised about whether there are currently any problems with the food made for senior pets that need to be addressed, such as possible harmful effects of certain senior pet food ingredients. Discussed was whether the workgroup would try to explore changing nutritional indicators and/or possibly look at the question of adding or amending nutritional profiles based on a certain way of defining “senior” animals. Current definition of seniors varies due to factors like breed, size, age and underlying genetics.

It was noted that pet food companies regard information on senior animal food ingredients as proprietary. Some companies base their product applications on internal studies that may be unavailable for public review. Products now on the market may be based on this proprietary information. Committee members agreed that the workgroup could collect in-house, PFC-accessible data derived from industry research and that all data would be restricted to workgroup access rather than made public.

The committee discussed issues related to the wide variability in senior-focused pet food already on the market. Noted was that the variability may indicate that there does not appear to be any notable problem that needs to be addressed. Creating a profile would not necessarily mitigate issues.

Also discussed was whether an expert panel with or without a workgroup might be formed to look into a setting a nutritional profile for senior animals. Committee members questioned whether sufficient data exists for consideration by an expert panel. No action on this subject was taken.

4. **HUMAN GRADE WORKGROUP**

On a motion made by Holly Jewell seconded by Barbara-Jean Schleicherit was resolved to continue efforts by the Human Grade Workgroup on considering how to identify qualified third parties to audit the Human Grade Standard and for AAFCO to establish criteria and a process for those additional third parties to be added to a list of acceptable firms. Motion carried,

ACTION – The Human Grade Workgroup requested PFC to update their charge.

Holly Jewell updated PFC on the workgroup’s efforts to look at possibly including additional third-party firms that could provide assessments and certification. The workgroup wanted to make sure the entire committee had a chance to weigh in and consider whether this is something to continue exploring, making sure committee members are comfortable with this status before focusing on how to decide which third parties would be qualified.

Discussed was whether the AAFCO board should have oversight of any third-party firms by, for example, auditing the firms’ audits. Moreover, state institutions would have to agree to the use of third-party firms. Thus, there would be a need to establish guardrails, limits and benchmarks that the committee and the board should consider in the workgroup’s charge.

Committee members expressed that this is probably a good time to look at third-party participation. Workgroup members representing states also expressed that this is a good idea as they favor handing over auditing additional tasks to additional third-party firms.

A committee member asked whether in the past AAFCO had ever farmed out regulatory authority to a third party or whether this is a new idea. In reply, it was mentioned that organic standards are approached with third-party audits under and for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). It was reported that the workgroup reviewed these USDA third-party audits and found them appropriate.

5. PURPOSE STATEMENT AS IT RELATES TO INGREDIENTS WORKGROUP

Liz Beckman, Pet Food Committee co-chair, noted that some members have joined this purpose statement ingredients workgroup but now a workgroup lead is needed. Anyone interested in leading is invited to send an email to Liz Beckman at lbeckman@agr.wa.gov.

6. TRAINING AND OUTREACH SUB-COMMITTEE

6.1 SME Volunteers

Tiffany Leschishin PFC training and outreach subcommittee chair discussed efforts to collect information for a subject matter expert database that can be used by the Training and Outreach Sub-committee. A web-accessed, fillable form that can be used to contribute to the database was displayed and explained. Contributors in various fields can use the form to enter professional details and describe their area of expertise in pet and specialty pet foods. The completed database is expected to be used by PFC when there is a need for participants in various projects such as training, presentations or panel discussions. To add your name click [here](#).

6.2 Regulator / Industry Outreach Workgroup (RIO)

Katie Simpson, workgroup lead, described work underway and the tools utilized, such as small manufacturer guidance slides, under the website's PFLM resources section. Recent efforts have focused on developing a nutrition facts checklist.

Katie Simpson announced she is stepping down as lead for RIO and is being replaced by Kelsi Brown.

6.3 Vet / Consumer / Retailer Workgroup (VCR)

Kelsi Brown, workgroup lead, described edits that have been completed on the website's consumer tab. The page has been modernized and made more consumer friendly.

6.4 Startups Website Update

Jennifer Roland gave an update on the "startups" part of the AAFCO website. She stated that by meeting biweekly the contributors have updated the information and expect to complete work on all of the website page tabs in the near future

6.5 Distributor and Retailer Training Modules

Tiffany Leschishin described progress in gathering veterinary, retailer and distributor support for building learning modules. Employees and staff can benefit from the training, as they are

asked direct questions about PFLM by consumers. Informed responses can reinforce their credibility.

Learning modules would provide a platform for handling situations that pet professionals may be dealing when addressing customers. For example, they can know how to answer questions about understanding pet food labels. Professionals are thus able to assist clients in real world situations.

The modules employ interactive learning with engaging questions and answers. They include short videos, guidance information, and scenario displays. Certificates of completion would be provided to those who finish the modules, thus providing a way to show that they know how to help clients make choices and understand pet food. All resources for the modules will be curated from existing AAFCO material and will not incur for AAFCO any additional costs. More help is needed to develop frequently asked questions and conduct reviews of materials. Anyone who wants to participate is invited to reach out to Tiffany.

6.6 Training and Outreach Events

Tiffany Leschishin announced that pet food labeling training will be offered at the 2027 AAFCO meeting. Anyone who wants to participate is invited to reach out.

7. NEW BUSINESS

7.1 Enzyme Language

Discussion of this topic was delayed until more information becomes available in the future.

8. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Kelsi Brown and seconded by Barbara-Jean Schleicher and carried, it was agreed that there was no further business to transact; the meeting closed at 2:58 p.m.

DISCLAIMER

The above minutes should be used as a summary of the motions passed and issues discussed at the meeting. This document shall not be considered a verbatim copy of every word spoken at the meeting.

Director

Director

Date

Date