Our Ingredients Policy

Honey's
REAL DOG FOOD
Ingredients. The word hardly sends the heart racing. You won’t find it in the title of any adventure film (there’s no Raiders of the Lost Ingredients, for example, or Mission: Ingredients) or book (it isn’t Twenty Thousand Ingredients Under The Sea or Where Ingredients Dare). For that matter, Tennyson did not write The Ingredients of the Light Brigade or Coleridge The Rime of the Ancient Ingredients and… but I am labouring my point. On the face of it, there is nothing interesting, nothing intriguing, nothing – well – magical about the subject of ingredients.

On the face of it. The fact is, however, that ingredients are central to and/or inextricably linked with all sorts of terrifically important things. Environmental care, for starters. Also, our health – both mental and physical. Not to mention pleasure and, tragically, a good deal of pain. Moreover, the agri-food sector, which would be nowhere without actual ingredients, is worth £109 billion a year and employs around one-in-seven British workers. In short, ingredients are anything but boring, and are worthy of study.

Which is why we have prepared this booklet. It contains information about the ingredients we use at Honey’s and considers all sorts of related topics – some practical, some ethical and some bordering on the spiritual.

Vicky Marshall
Managing Director
We started making raw dog food in Vicky’s kitchen in 2008 and we launched our business in 2009. So, we have been buying ingredients for a few years. In any given week we buy around 20 tons of them, which is about the same as 400 shopping trolleys of fresh meat, bone and vegetable.

As you will read elsewhere in this booklet it has always been our policy to visit our producers as it is the only way to really learn about what they do and to build meaningful relationships (how can you have a relationship with someone you only know through email and phone calls?).

Honey’s is well established but hardly long established. However, one of the founders, Jonathan, does have considerable, specialist knowledge of the food sector. One of his first ever jobs was selling something called a warm water udder washer to dairy farmers and he went on to farm himself – cattle in Australia and free range pigs in Ireland. Later, he became a journalist and ever since has been writing about food, farming, the countryside and the environment. In fact, you may have read him in such publications as The Times and Country Life. He has made hundreds of farm visits. Interestingly, his father also wrote about farming for The Economist in the 1940s and 1950s and published a book called The State and the Farmer.

All of which is a rather waffly way of saying that while we will always have lots to learn, we aren’t complete newbies when it comes to the matter of ingredients, farming, growing, markets, slaughter houses &c..
You are in the supermarket trying to decide which bag of potatoes to buy. You notice that one bag has a rather attractive picture of a smiling farmer dressed in tweeds and sucking on a piece of straw leaning over a gate. Underneath the photograph is a message: ‘Meet our grower, Alf Thompson, of Greendale Farm.’ ‘Ah ha,’ you say to yourself, ‘these are the spuds for me. I will buy them and support a lovely, small, British farmer.’ Possibly you move on, reciting (under your breath because you don’t want to appear a show off), the opening few lines of Pope’s *The Quiet Life*:

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Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
In winter fire.
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Sadly, there is a good chance that things are not as they appear. For example, Tesco got into dreadful trouble in March 2016 for inventing seven farms that don’t really exist and featuring them on their packaging. Moreover, although some supermarkets do buy from small producers and can identify who actually grew or farmed what, generally speaking they are dealing with such large quantities of food it just isn’t possible.

There is much wrong with British agriculture. Ingredient quality is falling, we import far too much from overseas (clocking up food miles and damaging the environment in the process), only industrial-scale farmers can make a decent profit and then much of it comes from subsidies, food (which, after all, we need to survive) is severely undervalued in economic terms, there is less and less diversification, the bee population (vital, after all) is in decline... we could go on.

Moreover, the public’s image of British agriculture has been severely distorted by decades of clever marketing. We want to believe that farmers are happy souls, lovingly caring for their animals and tending their crops. Yes, they complain about the weather. Yes, they grumble about the price of barley. But, basically, they are the salt of the earth.

The reality is that traditional, small to medium-scale farmers now depend on non-farm income to keep going. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. What we are describing is the trend.

Which is a long way around to get to the question of why we don’t show individual farmers in our marketing. First, it could create an erroneous impression of our buying policy, making us look better than we are. The fact is sometimes we know the individual farmer we are buying from but sometimes we don’t. This is because a percentage of our ingredients are bought from wholesalers. If we are dealing with a wholesaler we send them details of our strict buying policy and visit some *but not all* of their suppliers. If we can’t show every single farm we are buying from we would rather not show any. Second, we feel the whole business of featuring producers has been devalued and discredited by the supermarket chains. They are using photos like the one described above to mislead consumers and we wouldn’t want any Honey’s customer to think we were up to the same trick. What we do do sometimes is write up about our farm visits on our Facebook page and if you are interested in seeing the actual farms where our ingredients come from this is the best place to look.
Thanks, in part, to the research and development work we are doing we currently buy around 50 different food ingredients on a regular basis.

All our ingredients are British. As the term ‘British’ can be applied to ingredients that have been processed in the UK, by British we mean raised or grown in the UK. Our ingredients do not travel here from overseas.

Because all our ingredients are British they are also seasonal. You will find that each of our recipes changes in colour during the year. For example, in summer our chickens could be eating clover, which has the effect of giving their meat a slightly yellow appearance and our beef will be fatter because the cattle is feasting on new season grass. The choice of vegetables makes a difference to the colour, too. Another effect of only buying British is that we don’t always have all our recipes available. We freeze as much as we can but we can’t always promise to have, say, lamb or rabbit or other wild game.

All our ingredients are suitable for human consumption at the point at which we make our food. In other words, our ingredients could also be sold for human consumption. Or to put it in even plainer English; they are fresh! (As an aside by law we are not allowed to describe our food as suitable for human consumption as it is legally considered to be pet food and we are regulated by DEFRA. It is suitable, however. No other dog food manufacturer can say this and our local Trading Standards officers get complaints from our so-called competitors because we are, not to beat about the bush, showing them up!).

As explained above, we visit all the farmers who supply our ingredients direct at least once a year. If we are buying from a wholesaler we audit their buying policy and visit some but not all of their producers. We also visit the abattoirs that our producers use (see below).
A word about tripe

You will see that we use washed tripe in our food. This is green tripe that has been washed in plain water with nothing added. Once this has been done it becomes suitable for human consumption, i.e. it meets the necessary food safety standards. As we work to human food safety standards we won’t allow green tripe onto our premises. We wish we could because it is FANTASTIC for dogs. If you can store it away from human food and if you observe the necessary hygiene we would definitely recommend it. If you would like to know more about this please do contact us.

The meat we use in our food

The meat we buy falls into one of three categories: free range, wild and certified organic. This is what we mean by these definitions.

Free range

‘Free range’ is the minimum standard of animal (and poultry) husbandry we will consider. It is a confusing term because it is defined differently according to who is using it, the country of production and the type of animal or bird. Unfortunately, there is no universally accepted definition (unlike, say, wild or organic) in the UK and that means each producer has to be treated on a case-by-case basis. Farmers will have widely differing standards that may also depend on the time of year, the age of the animal or bird and the geography of their farm.

To give you a personal example of this when Jonathan, one of our founders, was a free range pig farmer his pigs lived outside all year round with arks for shelter. The birth of piglets was generally unsupervised (unless the sows were in trouble) and the new born piglets were left with their mothers. The pigs foraged for food although this was supplemented with organic pignuts and food scraps. However, other free range pig farmers may bring their sows indoors for farrowing (giving birth) and also when their land is wet and muddy.

Because our primary concern is farm animal welfare what we are looking for are farmers who care about their livestock or poultry and ensure that they lead good, healthy lives. That means plenty of time outdoors, lots of space and regular opportunities to display natural behaviours such as scratching in soil, roosting or foraging for food.

Wild

When we say ‘wild’ we mean animals and birds that are completely free to roam/fly wherever they want and which forage for their own food. When we buy wild meat we do have various requirements. In the case of rabbit, for example, it must be headshot. This sounds dreadful but the reason is that it means the rabbit died instantly. We remove the head so that traces of the shot won’t have had a chance to get into the flesh. We won’t buy anything that has been trapped.

Certified organic

We also buy certified organic meat from certified organic producers. A certified organic producer must comply with the rules and regulations laid down by one of the recognised organic certification bodies, such as the Soil Association, Organic Farmers and Growers Association, Organic Food Federation, Biodynamic Agricultural Association, Organic Trust Association and Quality Food Welsh Association.
The vegetables we use in our food

There is less choice when it comes to vegetables than with meat. There are organic vegetables and non-organic vegetables. Our certified organic recipes use certified organic vegetables (naturally). We buy most of our non-organic vegetables from a single producer who grows the majority for us and buys in the rest direct from other farmers. Our non-organic vegetables are washed in fresh drinking water with nothing added.

A subject no one wants to talk about

There is no perfect way to kill a living creature but it is obviously better if it is unexpected (so he or she has no time to anticipate what is coming) and painless. When Jonathan was a free range pig farmer he used to feed his pigs in his trailer and even drive them around a bit so that they were used to the experience. He would only ever slaughter a couple of pigs at a time, getting them drunk (on Guinness, if you are curious) and then drive them to the local butcher. At the butchers the whole thing was over in a matter of a few minutes. In an ideal world we would like to be able to insist that our producers all adopted a similar system. Unfortunately, we can’t. What we can do is visit the slaughter houses our producers use and check that they are as close as possible, keep waiting time to a minimum and show respect to the animals they are about to kill. We insist that every animal to be slaughtered is stunned first. Incidentally, Jonathan was so traumatised by being a pig farmer that he gave it up and became vegetarian.

Honey’s is certified organic

We are a certified organic producer. Our certification comes from the Organic Farmers and Growers Association (OF&G). It only applies to our certified organic recipes and ingredients. To learn more about what we have to do to call ourselves ‘certified organic’ visit the OF&G website: www.ofgorganic.org
Measuring the nutritional value of our food

We regularly test our food to assess its nutritional value. In one sense this is slightly pointless as no one really knows what nutrition a dog or cat needs. There are guidelines (see below) but they refer to processed food and are – as it happens – based on incomplete/questionable science. Still, despite our doubts, we do meet those guidelines. We also monitor the health of a sample of dogs eating our food using a model developed by the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). As we use pretty much the best ingredients available for consumption by humans we are confident that it wouldn’t be possible to much improve the quality and – accordingly – we think it is fair to assume that the nutritional value is sufficiently high. We don’t ever add supplements to our food. There are potential health risks with supplements and bioavailability is also questionable.

Incidentally, New Scientist magazine has published a couple of interesting articles about the nutritional value of food. In summary, certain varieties of fruit and vegetable (everything from pink grapefruit to broccoli) have much lower nutritional value than other varieties. This is because growers choose varieties that taste sweeter, whereas the more bitter fruit and vegetables are often better for us. Moreover, not all meat has the same nutritional value. Meat from a healthy, organic chicken has much more nutrition in it than meat from a heavily drugged (mostly with antibiotics), factory-farmed chicken.

Nutritional value is an important consideration when deciding how to feed not only your dog or cat but also yourself. It also highlights the fact that not all raw dog food is equal.

Honey's is fully compliant

At the end of 2015 Honey's joined the Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) and as such our food must meet Federation of European Pet Food Manufacturers (FEDIAF) guidelines. We don't have much confidence in these guidelines, but we are fully compliant with them.

Why we care so much about ingredients

This is why we care so much about the subject of ingredients:

We care on nutritional grounds. Animals and birds that are allowed to lead natural, healthy lives and that eat natural, healthy food produce more nutritious ingredients. If you feed your dog or cat with high quality ingredients then there is a much higher chance that all his or her nutritional requirements will be met. Dog food manufacturers – including raw dog food companies – that use poor quality ingredients have to add artificial supplements to their food to ensure it has sufficient nutrition.

We care on grounds of bioavailability. The body absorbs nutrition much more easily if it comes in a natural form. For example, a dog could absorb a higher percentage of calcium from a bone than from a calcium supplement. Indeed, it is generally recognised that non-food supplements are often difficult for the body to absorb.

We care on grounds of purity. Ingredients that are raised or grown without the use of hormones, antibiotics, fertiliser, pesticide and all the other tools beloved of those who believe in intensive farming are purer. Purer ingredients are less likely to cause health issues. Conversely, ingredients that contain chemicals, hormones &c. will, almost certainly, cause adverse health issues in the long run.

We care on ethical grounds. Animals and birds are sentient beings. They experience hunger, thirst, discomfort, pain, injury, disease, fear, frustration and distress. They also experience joy, contentment, satisfaction, love, loss and grief. They can experience boredom, sadness and anger. They can even experience humour. Given this, we are concerned about the welfare of the animals used in the food we make. It is important to us they are fed an appropriate diet, have proper shelter and are allowed to express their natural behaviour (such as nesting or foraging). We don't want them to be mistreated or frightened.
Why we don’t use fish

You may have noticed that we don’t offer any fish recipes or incorporate fish ingredients (such as fish oil) in any of our food. Why not? Commercial fishing adversely affects the environment. In fact, it’s wreaking havoc on our oceans. As a result of commercial fishing, 90 percent of large fish populations have been exterminated in the past 50 years. Farmed fish are no better for the environment. More than 40 percent of all the fish consumed each year are now raised on land-based or ocean-based aquafarms, where fish spend their entire lives in cramped enclosures and where many suffer from parasitic infections, diseases, and debilitating injuries. Contaminants from ocean-based aquafarms (fish excrement, uneaten chemical-laden food, and swarms of parasites) spread to the surrounding ocean, and the rampant disease inside the cages is passed on to ocean fish in the area, in some cases increasing the incidence of sea lice a thousandfold.

We say ‘no’ quite a bit

We hate to be negative, but we say ‘no’ to:
- Routine use of antibiotics
- Routine use of hormones
- Intensively reared animals or birds
- Factory farmed animals or birds
- Meat that isn’t free range, wild or organic
- Meat that isn’t suitable for human consumption
- Ingredients that aren’t raised or grown in the UK
- Colouring or flavouring
- Artificial supplements
- Out of season vegetables

10 ways pet food companies mislead consumers

It is easy to make ingredients seem much better than they are. Here are just 10 of the tricks that pet food companies get up to.

1. The use of misleading terms such as: ‘straight from the farm’, ‘local’, ‘seasonal’, ‘fresh’, ‘healthy’ and ‘natural’.

2. Endorsement by wholly irrelevant third party organisations.

3. The use of irrelevant terms. For example, food could be described as ‘sugar free’ or ‘low in fat’ when, by its very nature, it couldn’t be anything else.

4. The use of positive terms that aren’t actually as good as they sound. ‘Barn reared’ is a classic example. ‘Cage free’ is another. Neither means that the animal or bird is leading anything approaching a good life. Manufacturers often describe their food as being ‘DEFRA approved’... as if this was a good thing... but it has to be by law, so big deal. ‘Crude fibre’ (which sounds jolly healthy), incidentally, could be nothing of the kind and could refer to beet pulp, husks or even sawdust.

5. Endorsement by real organisations that have disappointingly low standards. We would take issue with, for example, some of the welfare standards set out by the RSPCA. We have no faith in the Red Tractor Scheme, either. The EU rules on the welfare of farm animals fall well short of anything we could ever support.

6. The use of photographs or illustrations of farms, countryside, happy farm animals/ poultry in fields etc. to imply much higher standards of welfare than actually exist.

7. The use of the Union Jack to imply that something is British, when it isn’t.

8. Not mentioning facts that would prejudice consumers against the food. No one wants to know that animal by products or derivatives refer to everything from feathers to testicles. No one wants to hear that the nutritional value is actually supplied using chemical/artificial supplements. No one wants to hear that the meat was rotten and came from intensively farmed chickens that led short, painful lives.

9. The appalling misuse – in the world of pet food – of the words ‘suitable for human consumption’. This means that the ingredients must have been suitable for human consumption when they were slaughtered not at the point in which they were used to make the actual food.

10. The use of the word ‘organic’ when their food isn’t organic or – surprisingly common – the introduction of a couple of organic ingredients or recipes so that they can plaster the word organic all over their marketing material.
Please do get in touch if you would like to know more

If you would like to know more about Honey's ingredients policy please get in touch with - Jonathan – one of our founders. His personal email is js@jonathanself.com. He is a journalist by trade and not involved in the running of the business. However, he takes a keen interest in everything to do with ingredients, food, the countryside, farming and animal welfare and welcomes any opportunity to discuss the company's policy. If you ever come across research or articles that you think would interest us please forward them to Jonathan. Thank you.

Compassion in World Farming

We put our money where our mouth is. We donate 1% of sales to Compassion in World Farming (www.ciwf.org.uk), which uses it to campaign for better treatment of farmed animals. (As an aside many companies will talk about giving a percentage of their profits to charity. Profits are something of a moveable feast, which is why we make it a percentage of our sales. We also support a number of other charitable organisations with significant sums of money, but the 1% to Compassion is the most relevant to our ingredients policy).

In conclusion

There is a version of Loren Eisley's essay The Star Thrower in which two men are walking along a beach covered by thousands of washed-up, dying starfish. One of the men starts throwing individual starfish back into the water. The other man points out that there are so many starfish in trouble nothing his companion can do will make any difference. The first man replies that it will make a difference to each starfish he saves. It is an oft-repeated story but that doesn't make it any the less true. Sydney Smith, the 19th century parson, put it in a nutshell when he said: 'It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little – do what you can.' We know that we can't put everything we feel strongly about (and there are a great number of issues we feel strongly about) right, but there are things we can do, and we try to do them.