

ENHANCING THE SAFETY OF LOCALLY PREPARED FOODS



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What do I need to know to sell PET FOODS or PET TREATS at the farmers market?

What are pet foods and/or pet treats?

Pet food or pet treats consist of any food produced with the intent of being consumed by pets (see fig. 1). Pets could include dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, hamsters, and other domesticated animals.



Figure 1. Example of pet treats. (Photo available at pxhere.com; CC0 public domain.)

Why prepare pet foods and/or pet treats?

Pet foods and treats are popular items to purchase at farmers markets. Producing and selling homemade pet foods and/or treats can be very lucrative. Nationwide, pet food and treat sales gross over \$26 billion (Packaged Facts 2017). Locally produced and homemade products are often sold at a premium.

In Virginia, any pet food or pet treat producer must obtain licensing and permits for pet food production through the Agricultural Commodities Program from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Office of Plant Industry Services. As a producer, you may need to register each individual product you produce.

Do the pet foods or treats I am producing need to be inspected?

In Virginia, inspection of the facility where you produce your pet food or treats is not required. However, pet food/treat producers must follow good manufacturing practices outlined in CFR Title 21, Part 110 (CFR 2019).

What steps do I need to take to sell pet foods or treats?

Each state regulates the sale of pet foods/treats differently. In Virginia, the following steps should be followed before producing and selling pet foods or treats.

1. Obtain a Virginia Commercial Feed License from VDACS. This license is required for production of all canned animal food, medicated feed, small package commercial feed, and/or specialty pet feed. Depending on what type of pet food or treat you are producing, the Virginia Commercial Feed License annual fee ranges from \$35 to \$50. You can obtain the license at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/reg-feed.pdf. (VDACS 2018) This license must be renewed annually and covers the calendar year (Jan. 1-Dec. 31).

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2. Decide how you will sell your pet foods/treats at your market booth. This is important because your decision will influence the registration fee(s) you will need to pay. Generally, your product can be sold in one of two ways:

- **Loose and unpackaged (self-serve and bulk)** – The seller sets up bins with different flavors/varieties that the customer can fill bags with. Bulk items do not require individual product registration; however, they do require an annual tonnage fee of \$0.07/ton on your annual total sales (\$35 minimum) (VDACS 2019).
- **Small package or pre-packaged** – The seller packages items before sale into individual packages of 10 pounds or less. Each package can have a different flavor or be marketed to a different size of animal. For example, specific products (beef versus chicken) made for different sizes of dogs (small, medium, large). In this case, each type of pet food/treat requires a separate registration fee (\$50 per product). The following examples are provided by the VDACS Office of Plant Industry Services (VDACS 2019; see fig. 2).

PRODUCT REGISTRATION EXAMPLE

If your products are different in brand name, ingredients or in guaranteed analysis, you must register each product. Additional package sizes for the **same** brand name do not require registration. For instance, you are making three flavors of dog treats - **beef**, **chicken** and **cheese** – and want to make them in three sizes - a **small**-sized biscuit [for little dogs], a **medium**-sized biscuit [for average size dogs] and a **large**-sized biscuit [for big dogs], and you want to package them in 8 oz. and 1 lb. packages. You would need to register the following brand names as a total of nine (9) products as shown:

1. **Beef** Treats for **Small** Dogs
2. **Chicken** Treats for Small Dogs
3. **Cheese** Treats for Small Dogs
4. **Beef** Treats for **Medium** Dogs
5. **Chicken** Treats for Medium Dogs
6. **Cheese** Treats for Medium Dogs
7. **Beef** Treats for **Large** Dogs
8. **Chicken** Treats for Large Dogs
9. **Cheese** Treats for Large Dogs

The total registration fee for the above products would be \$450.00 (9 products @ \$50 each = \$450.00).

If you do not include the size indicator (small, medium, large, etc.) in the brand name, you only need to register each flavor of treat (in this case three). Then the total registration fee would be \$150.00 for three treat brands. You may include a feeding recommendation for animal size on your label. See example label...

Figure 2. Example of a product registration for different types of pet treats. (Photo courtesy of VDACS 2019.)

3. Register your product(s). Depending on how you decided to sell your products, you must now register them. The application is found at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/reg-feed.pdf. The registration fee for each product must be renewed annually and covers Jan. 1 through Dec. 31 (VDACS 2018).

What are the labelling requirements for pet foods and treats?

Each package of food must include a label (fig. 3). This label must include:

- ▶ **Statement of identity** (product identity). This includes the brand name of the food/treat.
- ▶ The **animal species** the food/treat is intended for (e.g., dogs,

cats, horses, rabbits, etc.). The animal species must be written on the front label with the wording, “This food/treat is made for [insert type of animals here].”

- ▶ **Statement of product quantity.** The label must include the weight for solid products or the volume for liquid products and include metric equivalents (e.g., number of bones or treats, net weight 12 oz. [340 g]).
- ▶ **Ingredients** in descending order by weight.
- ▶ **Guaranteed analysis.** The following components must be included and listed in the order below:
 - Crude protein (min) – XX%
 - Crude fat (min) – XX%
(Crude fat [max] if labeled as “low fat” or “reduced fat” – XX%)
 - Crude fiber (max) – XX%
 - Moisture (max) – XX%

A process authority or private lab can provide a guaranteed analysis. The process authority can also help you identify the minimum requirements of a guaranteed analysis, including percentage requirements of crude protein, crude fat, crude fiber, and moisture. You can find process authorities through the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO 2019).

- ▶ **Nutritional adequacy statement.** If your product is being sold as a pet food (not a treat), you need to include a statement confirming that your product meets specific nutritional requirements. However, if your product is a snack or a treat, a statement is not required, but it is generally recommended that a statement be included indicating that the product is not intended to be the animal’s food/primary food source. For example: “For intermittent or supplemental feeding only,” or “Not a complete food.”
- ▶ **Name and address of the manufacturer.**

Huckleberry's Howlin' Biscuits

A wholly healthy treat for your pup!

Gourmet Chicken Flavored Dog Treats
For Medium Dogs

Ingredients:

Organic buckwheat, freeze dried chicken liver, freeze dried chicken heart, chicken broth

Guaranteed analysis:

Crude protein (min) 14%; Crude fat (min) 8%; Crude fiber (max) 4%;
Moisture (max) 10%.

Keep at refrigerated temperatures
below 41°F (5°C) to maintain freshness for up to two weeks.
NOT A COMPLETE FOOD. FEED AS SNACK OR TREAT.

Net wt: 12 oz (341 g)

Huckleberry's Howl,
3333 West Main Street, Blacksburg, VA 24061
540.923.3577
info@huckhowl.com

Figure 3. Example of product label for a pet treat. (Photo courtesy of Lily Yang.)



What are the most important food safety steps I need to consider when preparing pet foods and treats?

Many foodborne pathogens that can cause illness in humans can also make pets sick. When producing pet foods and treats, it is important to reduce the risk of contaminating the product with potentially harmful pathogens. Improper preparation and handling of pet foods and treats can also cause human illness. *Salmonella*, a known pathogen that can contaminate pet foods and treats, has been associated with many outbreaks linked to pets and their owners.

Important steps to follow to ensure that your pet food/treat is being prepared safely include:

- ▶ Practicing proper personal hygiene.
- ▶ Using proper cleaning and sanitizing procedures both before and after production and when preparing and working with pet foods and treats.
- ▶ Purchasing ingredients from approved and reputable suppliers.
- ▶ Using a validated process to ensure that you are producing pet foods and treats safely and properly.
- ▶ Storing the final product properly. If refrigeration is required, please store pet foods or treats below 41°F (5°C). Store dry foods and treats in a cool and dry location below 80°F (27°C).

How should I store and sell my pet foods or treats at the market?

Pet food can be sold in bulk (self-service style) or packaged at the farmers market. If the product requires refrigeration, make sure the product is stored in a cooler at 41°F (5°C) or below and instruct customers to store at those temperatures following the purchase as well. For non-refrigerated products, store in dry containers that you can keep at room temperature.

To prevent the spread of harmful bacteria and viruses, limit customer (and children) handling of pet foods and treats. If necessary, include a sign of your policy for handling your products. Also provide appropriate tools to allow proper handling of your products (e.g., tongs, serving spoons, etc.).

Additional Resources

Virginia Cooperative Extension. 2018. Going to Market: A Guide to Selling Raw, Processed and Prepared Food Products From Your Home, at Farmers' Markets, Stores & Roadside Stands. www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/ANR/ANR-46/FST-273.pdf.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. 2019. Handling Pet Food Safely. www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/petsafe.pdf.

References

- Association for Food and Drug Officials. 2019. Food Processing Authorities. Available at: <http://www.afdo.org/foodprocessing>.
- Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). 2019. Available at <https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/ECFR?page=browse>.
- Packaged Facts. 2017. Pet Food in the U.S. 13th ed. Rockville, MD: Packaged Facts.
- VDACS (Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services). 2019. Home Manufactured Pet Foods/Treats: What You Need to Know. www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/pet-treat-booklet.pdf.
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. 2018. Virginia Feed License Application. Available at: <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/reg-feed.pdf>.