



Nutrition Philosophy

Introduction

At Fresh Start Rescue, our goal is simple: Provide safe, digestible, science-supported nutrition for every dog in our care. Rescue dogs often arrive with unknown histories, sensitive stomachs, stress-related GI issues, or inconsistent diets. Because of this, we prioritize foods that have been proven through scientific feeding trials, not just foods that “look good” on an ingredient list.

Our nutrition guidelines follow recommendations from:

- DACVN Board-certified Veterinary Nutritionists
 - DACVN means Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Nutrition, and it's the highest possible credential a veterinary nutritionist can hold. These individuals are independent specialists and do not work for pet food companies.
- Veterinary Cardiologists
- University veterinary teaching hospitals
- AAFCO feeding trial standards
- WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee

This ensures that every dog receives food that is clinically tested, nutritionally complete, and safe for long-term health.

What AAFCO Is — and Why It Matters

AAFCO stands for the Association of American Feed Control Officials. They set the minimum nutrient standards for pet food in the United States.

But here's the critical part: Most dog foods only meet AAFCO standards “on paper.” This means the nutrient levels look correct in a lab, but the food has never been tested on real dogs.

That's a problem, because “on paper” nutrition does **not** guarantee:

- digestibility
- nutrient absorption
- stool quality
- long-term safety
- real-world health outcomes

AAFCO Feeding Trials

AAFCO feeding trials are the gold standard of pet nutrition. They require:

- real dogs eating the food



- veterinary monitoring
- bloodwork
- stool quality evaluation
- weight tracking
- nutrient absorption testing
- proof of long-term safety

Only a small number of companies invest in feeding trials because they are expensive and require scientific oversight. Feeding trials are truly the only objective way to confirm a diet's safety, digestibility, and real nutritional impact on living dogs.

What WSAVA Is — and Why It Matters

WSAVA stands for the World Small Animal Veterinary Association. Their Global Nutrition Committee is an international group of veterinary nutrition experts who set the highest standards in the world for pet food safety, research, and formulation. Furthermore, the WSAVA does not allow paid endorsements or financial incentives.

WSAVA evaluates whether a company:

- employs full-time board-certified veterinary nutritionists
- conducts feeding trials (not just formulation)
- owns and operates its own manufacturing facilities
- publishes peer-reviewed research
- maintains decades of health outcome data
- provides transparent sourcing and quality control

Only three companies meet *all* WSAVA criteria. This is why they form our Primary Tier.

Primary Recommendations (Top Tier)

These are the brands most recommended by veterinary nutritionists, cardiologists, and internists — not because of marketing (or the common misconception of veterinary kickbacks (which is prohibited by the WSAVA and AAFCO), but because of evidence.

- **Purina Pro Plan**
- **Hill's Science Diet / Hill's Prescription Diet**
- **Royal Canin**

These companies are in the **Primary Tier** because they:

- conduct extensive AAFCO feeding trials
- employ multiple full-time veterinary nutritionists
- publish peer-reviewed research
- own their manufacturing facilities



- have decades of safety and digestibility data
- maintain strict quality control
- produce highly digestible, consistent formulas
- meet all WSAVA criteria

These are the diets most veterinarians feed their own pets.

Our Preferred Rescue Formulas

Fresh Start Rescue feeds formulas that are:

- backed by feeding trials
- gentle on sensitive stomachs
- highly digestible
- safe for dogs with unknown histories
- widely available and affordable for fosters and adopters

Our preferred formulas are:

Purina Pro Plan Sensitive Skin & Stomach (Salmon)

- Gentle protein
- Excellent digestibility
- Ideal for stressed or sensitive dogs.

Purina Pro Plan Lamb & Rice

- A mild, well-tolerated protein source
- Transitions smoothly from many foods

These formulas work well for 99% of rescue dogs and are supported by decades of clinical research.

Secondary Recommendation

NutriSource

NutriSource is a high-quality, locally made option. It is widely trusted by Minnesota rescues and is known for excellent digestibility and gut-supportive formulation.

NutriSource is in our **Secondary Tier** because:

- It does not meet all WSAVA criteria (no published peer-reviewed research, no full-time boarded nutritionists)
- It does not conduct the same depth of feeding trials as the top three



Despite not having the science backed evidence as those in our top tier, NutriSource is included in our secondary tier because it:

- is locally manufactured in Minnesota
- has strong quality control
- has company-owned manufacturing facilities
- has grain-inclusive diets aligned with veterinary recommendations
- has excellent digestibility and stool quality
- has “Good 4 Life” gut-health system (prebiotics, probiotics, mineral absorption support)
- has high palatability for sensitive stomachs
- is cost-effective and accessible for adopters

In short:

Primary Tier = highest level of scientific evidence

Secondary Tier = high-quality, rescue-friendly, locally made option

NutriSource is a strong choice for adopters who prefer a Minnesota-made brand while still staying aligned with veterinary nutrition science.

What We Avoid

We avoid foods that lack feeding trials or long-term safety data, including many “boutique,” “holistic,” or “grain-free” brands.

We also avoid:

- high-legume diets (peas, lentils, chickpeas)
- exotic proteins without clinical research
- grain-free formulas linked to DCM risk
- foods that rely solely on ingredient lists for marketing

Our priority is science, safety, and consistency — not trends.