

Blue Buffalo Gets Its Day in Court – And Then This Happened

A 2014 lawsuit was filed against Blue Buffalo, alleging they lied to customers about their use of natural ingredients. They claimed to have been defrauded by ingredient suppliers. Now the ruling is in. And you won't believe what the verdict was.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A feed ingredient supplier, Wilbur-Ellis Feed LLC, and a feed commodities broker have pled guilty to substituting low-cost ingredients such as ground up feathers and byproducts for premium pet food ingredients
- The case against them developed as a result of the discovery process in the Purina versus Blue Buffalo lawsuit filed in 2014; Blue Buffalo claimed they'd been defrauded by ingredient suppliers, including Wilbur-Ellis Feed
- Wilbur-Ellis Feed and the commodity broker admitted to having engaged in the practice for years, shipping adulterated and/or mislabeled ingredients to multiple pet food manufacturers
- Feather meal is a garbage ingredient deliberately included in some processed pet food as a "protein source"; the bioavailability of the protein in feathers is zero, meaning it cannot be used by the cells of the body
- One study also found that feather meal is contaminated with multiple pharmaceutical and personal care product residues

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published July 23, 2018.

Recently I came across a convoluted tale of dirty dealings in the processed pet food industry that I know will interest (but not surprise) many of you who are regular visitors here at Mercola Healthy Pets.

You may remember that in 2014, Nestlé Purina PetCare filed a lawsuit against Blue Buffalo, alleging Blue Buffalo had lied to customers about its use of natural ingredients. Blue Buffalo issued a public response on its website from founder and chairman, Bill Bishop. Bishop asserted that his company categorically denied the allegations and would defend the integrity of the Blue Buffalo brand and its products.

Bishop reiterated Blue Buffalo's advertising claims that his company does not use chicken or poultry byproduct meal, ground corn, or artificial preservatives in any of their products. In a further response a few days later, Bishop reassured the public that his company had never purchased even a kernel of corn or an ounce of poultry byproduct meal.

Blue Buffalo ultimately claimed it had been defrauded by its suppliers, and it turns out the company was correct, since discoveries in the case filed by Purina turned up some very shady practices involving a feed ingredient company.

Ingredient Supplier Admitted a History of Mislabeling Pet Food Ingredients

In March 2014, 50,000 pounds of what was supposedly only turkey meal was shipped from Texas to an Indiana pet food company. For reference, here's the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) definition of turkey meal:

The ground clean combination of flesh and skin with or without accompanying bone, derived from the parts or whole carcasses of turkey or a combination thereof, exclusive of feathers, heads, feet and entrails.¹

The supplier of the "turkey meal" was Wilbur-Ellis Feed LLC, a California-based feed company with a plant in Texas. Also involved in the transaction was Diversified Ingredients Inc. of Ballwin, Missouri, which is co-owned by a commodities trader and broker.

According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, a criminal case filed against the feed company and the broker revealed they "... had been mislabeling pet food ingredients for years, substituting lower cost poultry feathers, ground into feather meal, and byproducts for premium ingredients."² Both parties pled guilty to one count of adulteration or misbranding of food in federal court earlier this year.

As part of the plea, Wilbur-Ellis Feed admitted that between June 2013 and May 2014 they substituted lower cost pet feed ingredients for premium ingredients in shipments from a plant in Texas to pet food manufacturers. One of the lower cost ingredients was hydrolyzed poultry feathers, or ground-up feathers, also called hydrolyzed feather meal.

Blue Buffalo Wasn't the Only Pet Food Company To Be Defrauded

The plea also mentions a 50,840-pound shipment of a blend of chicken byproducts and poultry feathers that was labeled chicken meal, and therefore should not have contained chicken feathers, heads, feet or entrails (intestines).

As Susan Thixton of TruthAboutPetFood.com notes, it appears Wilbur-Ellis Feed shipped their lower cost ingredients, primarily ground feathers labeled as chicken or turkey meal, to multiple pet food companies. We know one of those companies was Blue Buffalo, but we don't know what other pet food producers also received feathers mislabeled as chicken or turkey meal.

Wilbur-Ellis Feed is likely to be placed on probation for three years and ordered to pay nearly \$5.5 million in damages. The commodities broker and co-owner of Diversified Ingredients Inc. could spend up to a year in prison.

Susan feels these plea deals are actually a big step in the right direction toward holding the pet food/feed industry accountable. She reminds us of the melamine pet food contamination disaster back in 2007 and points out that in 2009, the owners of a key player at the center of that scandal, ChemNutra, pled guilty to one count each of distributing adulterated food and selling misbranded food.

This was the deadliest pet food contamination event in history, and ChemNutra's owners were punished with a mere \$35,000 fine and three years probation.

"Maybe ... we will see more criminal and federal charges against pet food manufacturers and ingredient suppliers in the near future," writes Susan. "Maybe pet food/feed manufacturers and ingredient suppliers will be concerned enough about multi-million dollar fines and potential prison time to stop violating law. Maybe."³

Believe It or Not, Feather Meal Is the Main Protein Source in This ‘Anallergenic’ Pet Food

Royal Canin's "anallergenic" line, which uses feather meal as the main source of protein, was 10 years in the making. The company says it was designed for intensely allergic pets for which even novel protein diets don't seem to work. Here's the ingredient list for the Veterinary Diet Feline ANALLERGENIC dry cat food,⁴ and it's quite the little science experiment:

“Corn starch, hydrolyzed poultry by-products aggregate, coconut oil, vegetable oil, powdered cellulose, natural flavors, dried chicory root, calcium sulfate, fish oil, potassium phosphate, sodium silico aluminate, fructooligosaccharides, sodium pyrophosphate, vitamins (DL-alpha tocopherol acetate [source of vitamin E], inositol, niacin supplement, L-ascorbyl-2-polyphosphate [source of vitamin C], D-calcium pantothenate, biotin, pyridoxine hydrochloride [vitamin B6], riboflavin supplement, thiamine mononitrate [vitamin B1], vitamin A acetate, folic acid, vitamin B12 supplement, vitamin D3 supplement), L-lysine, DL-methionine, potassium chloride, choline chloride, taurine, L-tryptophan, L-alanine, L-histidine, salt, marigold extract (Tagetes erecta L.), trace minerals (zinc proteinate, zinc oxide, manganese proteinate, ferrous sulfate, manganous oxide, copper sulfate, sodium selenite, copper proteinate, calcium iodate), magnesium oxide, rosemary extract, glycine, preserved with mixed tocopherols and citric acid.”

Corn starch is the primary ingredient in this formula. Corn starch is nothing more than filler, and if you read here regularly you know that corn in any form is an ingredient I always recommend avoiding in pet food. It's notoriously allergenic (which is certainly odd in an “anallergenic” pet food), and is typically genetically modified.

The next ingredient on the list is “hydrolyzed poultry by-products aggregate,” which is a technical name for feather meal. The feathers are broken down to an amino acid level, and palatizers are added for taste.

Digestibility Versus Bioavailability of Feather Meal

Feathers are broken down to amino acids through a process called hydrolyzing. Hydrolyzing means to break down a protein source enzymatically. If enough enzymes are present, any type of protein can be hydrolyzed, allowing its amino acids to be absorbed through the walls of an animal's digestive tract and into the bloodstream.

This means the protein is digestible, but not necessarily bioavailable. The bioavailability or biological value (BV) of a nutrient is the measure of its usefulness to the cells of the body.

For example, eggs have a biological value of 100%, meaning all the amino acids in an egg are useful to the body. Soy has a BV of around 55%, which means 45% of the protein in soy winds up as waste product in the blood that the kidneys must filter out.

Feathers have 0% bioavailability, so while they can be made digestible through the hydrolyzing process, they cannot be used by your pet's body at the cellular level.

In addition, many amino acids are damaged by heat, and as we know, commercially available pet food — especially kibble — is processed at extremely high temperatures. Since amino acids act synergistically (interdependently) in the body, damage to some amino acids can render other, undamaged amino acids useless.

Contaminated Feather Meal

Another problem with feather meal is described in a recently published study titled "Feather Meal: A Previously Unrecognized Route for Reentry into the Food Supply of Multiple Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products (PPCPs)." Researchers found antimicrobials (antibiotics) in every feather meal sample tested (a total of 12), with up to 10 different drugs in some samples. Samples from China had the greatest number of antimicrobials.

In addition to the antibiotics, seven other PPCPs were found in the feather meal samples. Caffeine and acetaminophen (Tylenol) were found in 10 of the 12 samples, and 1,7-dimethylxanthine, a metabolite of caffeine, was in seven of the 12. Other drugs found in the samples included an antidepressant (Prozac), a fungicide/antiparasitic, an antihistamine (Benadryl) and norgestimate (a synthetic sex hormone).

If you have a dog or cat with a suspected food sensitivity, the first thing I recommend for pets over the age of 1 year is the **NutriScan food intolerance test**. NutriScan was developed by veterinarian Dr. Jean Dodds, and tests for 24 of the most common foods dogs and kitties eat. I also strongly encourage you to watch my video on how to heal your pet's food allergy.

Sources and References

¹ AAFCO.org

² [St. Louis Post-Dispatch, May 23, 2018](#)

³ TruthAboutPetFood.com

⁴ [Royal Canin](#)
