

K9 WADE FIELD MANUAL

THE FUEL PROTOCOL

How I feed my working dogs
fuel for a longer, stronger life.



WADE RICHTER

DOSSIER FM-04

Read this first. It takes ninety seconds, and it tells you exactly how to run this manual.

FILE	FM-04 — THE FUEL PROTOCOL
SERIES	K9 WADE FIELD MANUAL
OPERATOR	K9 WADE — ex-military K9 handler, dog rescuer
MISSION	TRAIN HIM. FEED HIM. KEEP HIM.
PILLAR	FEED + KEEP (companions: FM-01 The Rescue Walk, FM-02 Come When It Counts, FM-03 The Bad Day Book)

HOW TO RUN THIS MANUAL

- **Read it once, front to back.** Chapters 1–8 are the intel. Chapter 9 is the mission: a 7-day bowl reset.
- **Then live in the printable pages.** Anything tagged **PRINTABLE** is built to pin on the fridge: the label cheat sheet, the portion checklist, the 7-day tracker.
- **Run the two-week check rhythm.** Rib test, every two weeks, adjust 10%. That's the whole maintenance program.

A WORD BEFORE WE START

I pull dogs off the euthanasia list. Dogs with forty-eight hours left, surrendered for problems that were never their fault. Most of my work is training — that's Field Manuals 01 through 03.

But here's what the shelter paperwork never says: a dog can walk perfectly on a leash and still fall apart at seven because nobody fed his joints, his gut, his coat. Training gets the dog home. Fuel keeps him there — moving, bright-eyed, stealing your spot on the couch for as many years as nature allows.

This manual is the second pillar of the mission. **Train him. Feed him. Keep him.** Let's feed him right.

WARNING

This manual is field guidance from a handler, **not veterinary medicine**. It does not diagnose, treat, or replace your vet. Sudden changes in appetite, weight, energy, or stool earn a vet visit — always. Full safety brief in Chapter 8.

CONTENTS

FM-04 // THE FUEL PROTOCOL

CH	MISSION	PG
01	MISSION BRIEF — Training is one third of the job	04
02	WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS IN THE BOWL — The 80/20 of dog food	08
03	READ THE LABEL WITHOUT GETTING PLAYED — Ingredients, analysis, traps PRINTABLE	13
04	PORTIONS: THE BAG LIES — The rib test PRINTABLE	19
05	HYDRATION & RECOVERY — Water, timing, rest	24
06	THE DAILY CHEW — What goes in my kennel every morning	27
07	SENIOR DOGS — Slowing down is not giving up	32
08	WARNING: FOOD IS NOT MEDICINE — Bloat, allergies, the vet line	36
09	7-DAY BOWL RESET — Checklists + tracker PRINTABLE	39
10	FINAL ORDERS — Train him. Feed him. Keep him.	43

DEBRIEF

Chapters 1–8 are the intel — read once, know forever. Chapter 9 is the operation itself: seven days, one checklist per day, and a tracker. If you're short on time, read Chapter 1, run Chapter 9, and keep the cheat sheet from Chapter 3 on your fridge.

MISSION BRIEF

TRAINING IS ONE THIRD OF THE JOB

SITUATION REPORT

A dog can walk perfectly on a leash and still fall apart at seven — because nobody fed his joints, his gut, his coat.

Read that again. I have trained dogs that heel like soldiers and recall like their life depends on it. Beautiful work. And then, at seven, eight years old, the same dogs start slowing on the stairs. Stiff in the morning. Dull coat. Guts that can't handle a new bag without a week of misery.

That's not bad luck. That's fuel. Or the lack of it.

Nobody hands you a manual for this part. The shelter gives you the dog, the vet gives you a vaccine schedule, and the food aisle gives you forty bags all screaming that they're "premium," "holistic," and "vet-recommended." So most owners do what I did for years: grab the bag with the wolf on it and hope for the best.

Hope is not a feeding plan.

1.1 — THE THREE PILLARS

My mission has always been three things. Say them with me:

Train him. Feed him. Keep him.

TRAIN HIM is Field Manuals 01 through 03 — the loose-leash protocol, recall, and the bad-day book. That's the work that keeps dogs out of shelters. A trained dog is a kept dog.

FEED HIM is this manual. What goes in the bowl decides the quality of every year the training bought you. Protein builds the muscle that carries the training. Fat fuels the engine. The right support keeps the joints, gut, skin, and heart in the fight.

KEEP HIM is the long game both pillars serve: the senior years. The gray-muzzle years. A dog that trained well and ate well doesn't just live longer — he lives *better* longer. More good walks. More stupid games of fetch. More mornings.

WADE'S ORDERS

1. Training without fuel is a sports car with cheap gas. It runs — until it doesn't.
2. You do not need the perfect food. You need a *good enough* food, the right portion, and consistency. Perfect is the enemy of fed.
3. Nutrition is a slow weapon. Nothing in this manual works overnight. Everything in it works over years.

1.2 — WHAT FUEL ACTUALLY BUYS YOU

Let me translate "nutrition" into things you can see on your dog. Because nobody gets motivated by the word "micronutrients."

THEATER	WHAT GOOD FUEL LOOKS LIKE
Energy	Steady drive through a walk or a training session — no 20-minute rocket followed by a 2-hour crash.
Muscle	Named animal protein builds and holds the muscle that carries every command you trained.
Joints	The difference between a nine-year-old that bounds up the stairs and one that thinks about it first.
Gut	Firm stools, no drama on bag changes, a dog that actually absorbs what you paid for.
Coat & skin	Glossy coat, less itching, less shedding on your couch. The coat is the dashboard light of the whole system.
Years	The compounding interest of all of the above. Good fuel doesn't add years like a coupon — it stops bad fuel from stealing them.

DEBRIEF

Why is food a force multiplier? Because every rep of training runs on the body the food built. A dog fed like an athlete recovers like one, focuses like one, and ages like one. You're not buying kibble. You're buying *reps* — thousands of good ones, over a lifetime.

1.3 — THE 80/20 OF THIS MANUAL

Eighty percent of dog nutrition comes down to a short list. Here it is, up front, so you know where we're marching:

- ☐ **Named animal protein first.** "Chicken," "beef," "salmon" — a name you recognize, at the top of the list. (Chapter 2)
- ☐ **Adequate fat.** Fat is fuel and coat gloss in one. Too little and the whole dog runs dim. (Chapter 2)
- ☐ **Learn to read the bag in 60 seconds.** Ingredient order, the guaranteed analysis, and the traps. (Chapter 3)
- ☐ **Feed the dog in front of you.** The bag's chart is a starting rumor, not an order. The rib test is the truth. (Chapter 4)
- ☐ **Water, timing, rest.** The unglamorous trio that decides how the food actually performs. (Chapter 5)
- ☐ **One daily chew for joints, gut, coat, and steady energy.** My kennel standard, every morning. (Chapter 6)
- ☐ **Protect the senior.** Weight down, movement up, support in. (Chapter 7)
- ☐ **Know the red lines.** Bloat signs, allergy signals, when the vet outranks the manual. (Chapter 8)

That's the campaign. Eight objectives, one bowl at a time. Move out.

APPROVED FOR FIELD USE

WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS IN THE BOWL

THE 80/20 OF DOG FOOD

INTEL BRIEFING

Forget forty ingredients. Protein and fat do the heavy lifting. Everything else is support staff.

The dog food aisle is psychological warfare. Forty bags, all shouting. Wolves on the packaging. Words like "ancestral," "holistic," "dinner" (which legally means almost nothing, but that's Chapter 3). Owners freeze, grab the prettiest bag, and overpay for corn with a wolf on it.

I'm going to simplify this war down to three supply lines: **protein**, **fat**, and **everything else**. Get the first two right and you're already ahead of most of the aisle.

2.1 — PROTEIN: THE BUILDING MATERIAL

Muscle is built from protein. Tendons, ligaments, enzymes, immune cells — protein. Your dog is, structurally, a protein project that happens to bark.

The rule is simple: **the first ingredient should be a NAMED animal protein**. "Chicken." "Beef." "Salmon." "Turkey." A name you recognize, from an animal you can picture.

Not "meat." Not "poultry." Not "animal." Those are mystery words — they tell you the protein came from *something*, and the bag won't say what. A named protein is accountability. An unnamed one is a rumor.

How much protein? For a normal adult dog, look for a food whose guaranteed analysis shows crude protein in the mid-twenties or higher as a percentage. Working dogs, young athletes, and hard keepers do better toward the upper end. Puppies and performance dogs higher still. The exact number matters less than the source: named animal protein beats a bigger number built on vague meals and plant fillers.

WADE'S ORDERS

1. First ingredient: a named animal protein. Non-negotiable.
2. Two named animal proteins in the first five ingredients is a strong sign.
3. "Meal" is not a dirty word — "chicken meal" is just chicken with the water removed. But "meat meal" with no name attached is a stranger. Don't invite strangers to the bowl.

2.2 — FAT: THE FUEL

If protein is the building material, fat is the fuel in the tank. It carries more than twice the energy per gram of protein or carbs. It keeps the engine warm, the coat glossy, and the brain — which runs hot on fat — sharp.

A dog low on fat tells on himself fast: dull coat, flaky skin, flat energy, always a little cold. I've seen "low-energy" dogs that were really just under-fueled dogs. Fix the fat, and the dog you thought was lazy turns out to have been running on fumes.

Look for named fat sources too — "chicken fat," "salmon oil," "flaxseed." Same rule as protein: named beats mystery. And watch the guaranteed analysis for crude fat in the mid-teens as a healthy baseline for an active adult dog. Couch commanders need less; working dogs need more.

DEBRIEF

Why do protein and fat do the heavy lifting? Because the dog is a carnivore-leaning omnivore built to run on animal-sourced nutrition. Protein builds the machine; fat fuels it. Get those two right and the remaining 20% — fiber, vitamins, minerals — is fine-tuning, not rescue work.

2.3 — CARBS: THE SUPPORT STAFF

Carbohydrates are not the enemy. Repeat that until the internet stops yelling. A working dog burns through glycogen, and digestible carbs — rice, oats, sweet potato, barley — refill the tank just fine.

Carbs become a problem in two cases: when they're the *base* of the food instead of the support (protein and fat should lead), and when they're the cheap kind doing the heavy lifting for the protein number — looking at you, corn-gluten-everything.

Keep it simple: carbs in their place, protein and fat in the lead. A bowl that's mostly grain with a rumor of chicken is a grain bowl with a dog tax.

2.4 — THE BOWL SPEC SHEET

Tape this to the inside of your brain. When you're standing in the aisle, run every bag through this spec sheet before it earns a place in your cart.

SPEC	PASS	FAIL
First ingredient	Named animal protein: "chicken," "beef," "salmon"	"Corn," "meat," "poultry," anything vague
First five ingredients	Two or more named animal proteins	One named protein buried under grains
Crude protein	Mid-20s % or higher (adult); higher for puppies & workers	Low-20s % built on plant protein
Crude fat	Mid-teens % for an active adult; more for workers	Single digits on an active dog
Fat source	Named: "chicken fat," "salmon oil"	"Animal fat" — the mystery tanker
Carb role	Digestible carbs in support: rice, oats, sweet potato	Grain or filler as the base of the recipe
Red-flag words	Short, readable ingredient list	"Meat and bone meal," "animal digest," added sugars, artificial colors

2.5 — WHAT TO IGNORE ON THE BAG

The front of the bag is advertising. The back of the bag is the truth. Everything on the front exists to make you pick it up; everything that matters is in the ingredient list and the guaranteed analysis on the back.

- **Ignore the wolf.** Pretty pictures of wolves, sled dogs, and mountain ranges season the marketing, not the food.
- **Ignore "premium" and "gourmet."** These words have no legal definition in pet food. Anyone can print them.
- **Ignore the price-confidence trick.** Expensive doesn't mean good; cheap doesn't always mean bad. The spec sheet decides, not the price tag.
- **Read the back like intel.** Sixty seconds: first five ingredients, crude protein, crude fat. That's your recon. Chapter 3 teaches the full sixty-second drill.

WADE'S ORDERS

Your standing order in the food aisle: **flip the bag**. Front is the pitch; back is the product. Run the spec sheet. If it passes, it goes in the cart. If it fails, it goes back on the shelf — no matter how good the wolf looks.

READ THE LABEL WITHOUT GETTING PLAYED

INGREDIENTS, ANALYSIS, TRAPS

RECON DRILL

Sixty seconds, back of the bag, three things: what's in it, in what order, and what the numbers actually say.

Chapter 2 gave you the spec sheet. This chapter teaches you to verify it under fire — standing in the aisle, kid hanging off the cart, forty bags screaming. The label can't lie to you the way the front of the bag can. It can only *mislead* you, and only if you don't know the rules of the game.

There are four rules. Learn them once and no bag ever plays you again.



FIG. 3-1 — THE SIXTY-SECOND RECON: INGREDIENT LIST, GUARANTEED ANALYSIS, CALORIE PANEL.

3.1 — RULE ONE: ORDER IS WEIGHT

Ingredients are listed by weight, heaviest first — *before cooking*. That last part is the trick the industry hopes you miss.

"Chicken" as the first ingredient sounds great. But fresh chicken is ~70% water. After the kibble is cooked and dried, that chicken shrinks down the list. "Chicken meal" — chicken with the water already removed — doesn't shrink. So a bag that leads with "chicken meal" can actually deliver more chicken than a bag that leads with "chicken."

The fix: don't worship the first ingredient alone. Read the **first five**. They tell the real story of the recipe. Two named animal proteins in the first five? Strong bag. One lonely "chicken" followed by four grains? That's a grain bag wearing a chicken costume.

DEBRIEF

Why does order matter more than any single ingredient? Because the first five ingredients are the recipe. Everything after that is seasoning. Marketing wants you to read one word — "chicken!" — and stop. Intel work means reading the whole first line of the formation.

3.2 — RULE TWO: NAMED BEATS MYSTERY

Every ingredient falls into one of two camps: **named** or **mystery**.

NAMED (ACCOUNTABLE)	MYSTERY (RUMOR)
"Chicken," "chicken meal"	"Meat," "meat meal," "meat and bone meal"
"Beef," "beef meal"	"Animal fat," "animal digest"
"Salmon," "menhaden fish meal"	"Poultry by-product meal"
"Turkey," "lamb," "duck"	"Poultry," "livestock"

A word on by-products, because the internet has opinions: by-products are not poison. Organ meats are by-products, and they're nutrient-dense — wolves eat the organs first. The problem was never "by-product." The problem is **unnamed** by-product. "Chicken by-product meal" tells you the animal. "Meat by-products" tells you nothing. Named is accountable. Mystery is a rumor.

Same rule for fat: "chicken fat" and "salmon oil" are named and fine. "Animal fat" is the mystery tanker — could be anything, changes batch to batch, and the bag will never tell you.

3.3 — RULE THREE: DECODE THE GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

The guaranteed analysis is the box score. Minimums and maximums, legally guaranteed. Here's what each line actually tells you — and what it hides.

LINE	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	WHAT IT HIDES
Crude Protein (min)	The floor for protein content. Your main number.	<i>Source.</i> 26% from chicken beats 28% from corn gluten.
Crude Fat (min)	The floor for fat — the fuel gauge.	<i>Quality.</i> Named fat vs. mystery fat (see 3.2).
Crude Fiber (max)	Ceiling on fiber. Moderate fiber aids digestion.	Very high fiber can mean filler-heavy recipes.
Moisture (max)	Water content. ~10% for kibble, ~75%+ for wet.	You can't compare kibble % to wet % directly — different water weight.
Omega-6 / Omega-3	Fatty acids for skin, coat, and inflammation balance.	Often absent. Absence isn't failure — salmon oil covers it (Ch. 6).
Calorie content	kcal per cup / per kg. The portion math starts here.	Cups vary by kibble density — weigh, don't scoop-guess (Ch. 4).

Read the minimums as promises, not measurements. "Crude protein min 26%" means *at least* 26% — the bag guarantees the floor, not the ceiling. Two bags both reading "26%" can feed very differently depending on what's behind the number. That's why the ingredient list and the analysis are a team: the list says *what*, the analysis says *how much*.

3.4 — RULE FOUR: SPOT THE TRAPS

The front of the bag is allowed to mislead you in ways the back is not. Here are the four traps I see most:

TRAP 1 — The "grain-free" halo. "Grain-free" sounds like an upgrade. Sometimes it is. But grain-free bags often swap grains for peas, lentils, and potatoes — and stack them so high the recipe is still mostly starch, just trendier starch. Grain-free is not automatically better. Run the spec sheet anyway.

TRAP 2 — "All-natural." Means nothing. There is no legal definition. Sawdust is natural. Print it, sell it.

TRAP 3 — "Holistic" / "ancestral" / "wild." Also undefined. They're vibe words, not standards. The wolf on the bag has never read the ingredient list.

TRAP 4 — Ingredient splitting. One grain listed three ways — "ground corn, corn gluten meal, corn bran" — so each appears lower on the list while corn dominates the recipe. If you see the same plant wearing three costumes in the first ten ingredients, it's the main character.

WADE'S ORDERS

When a bag leans on vibe words instead of named ingredients, that's intel. A good recipe doesn't need a costume. **Trust the list, not the legend.**

LABEL-READING CHEAT SHEET

THE 60-SECOND RECON — BACK OF THE BAG

- ☐ **STEP 1 — Flip the bag.** Front is the pitch. Back is the product.
- ☐ **STEP 2 — Read the first FIVE ingredients.** Two named animal proteins in there? Good sign.
- ☐ **STEP 3 — First ingredient named?** "Chicken / beef / salmon" = pass. "Meat / poultry / corn" = fail.
- ☐ **STEP 4 — Scan for mystery words.** "Meat meal," "animal fat," "animal digest" = rumors. Reject.
- ☐ **STEP 5 — Check for splitting.** Same plant in three costumes = it's the main ingredient. Reject.
- ☐ **STEP 6 — Read the guaranteed analysis.** Crude protein: mid-20s%+ (adult). Crude fat: mid-teens% (active dog).
- ☐ **STEP 7 — Ignore the vibe words.** "Natural," "holistic," "ancestral," the wolf — none of it is the food.

FIELD TESTED

K9 WADE FIELD MANUAL // FM-04 THE FUEL PROTOCOL

PORTIONS: THE BAG LIES

FEED THE DOG IN FRONT OF YOU

HARD TRUTH

The feeding chart on the bag is written for a dog that doesn't exist — and it skews high, because the company sells food.

Think about it. The feeding guide is printed by the people who profit when you pour more. It's calibrated for the mythical "average dog" — average breed, average metabolism, average activity. Your dog is not the average dog. Nobody's dog is.

So here's the doctrine: **the bag's chart is a starting rumor. Your hands are the truth.** This chapter teaches you the rib test — the two-minute, no-scale, no-app body check that tells you exactly where your dog stands.

4.1 — THE RIB TEST

Stand your dog up. Run your hands flat over his ribs, like you're smoothing a tablecloth. Don't press. Don't dig. Just feel.

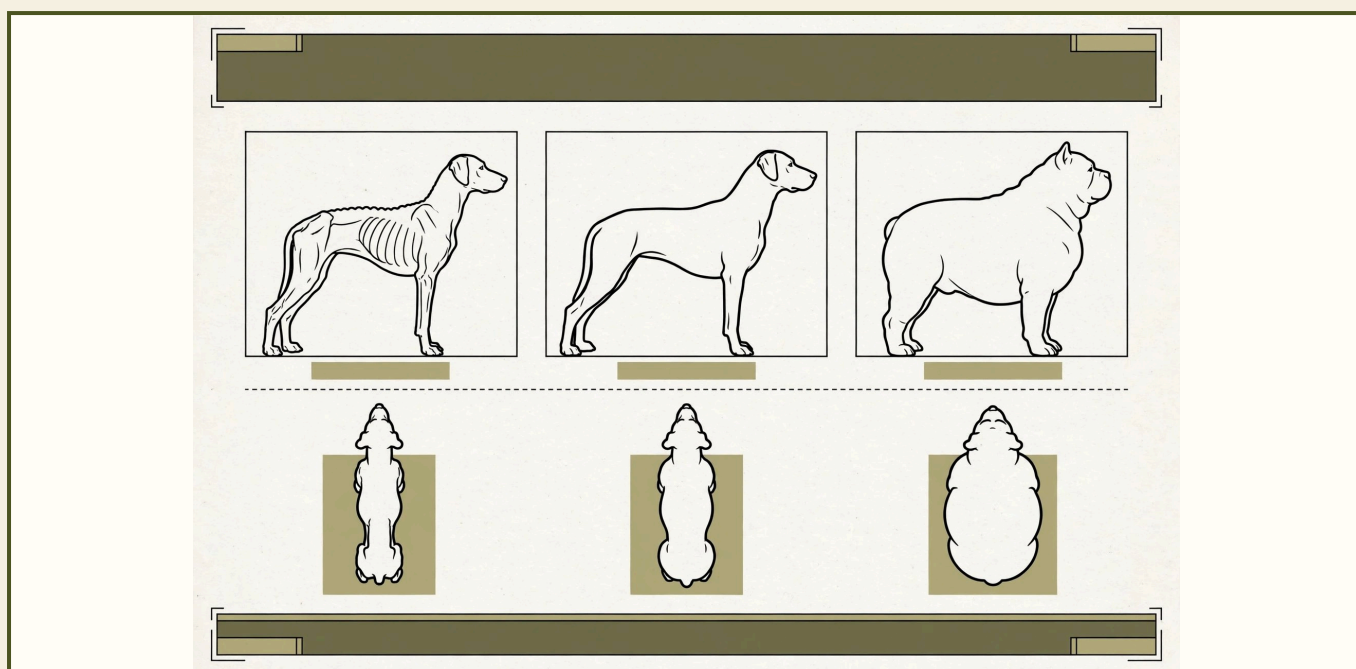


FIG. 4-1 – BODY-CONDITION FIELD CHART: RUN THE RIB TEST, CHECK THE WAIST.

FEEL but don't SEE. That's the whole test in four words. You should be able to *feel* each rib under a thin cover — like the back of your hand. If you have to press through padding to find them, the dog is carrying extra. If the ribs are visible from across the room with no cover at all, he's under.

Then check the waist from two angles:

- **From above:** there should be a visible waist — an hourglass tuck behind the ribs. No waist, straight barrel: extra weight.
- **From the side:** the belly should tuck UP behind the ribs. A belly that hangs level with or below the chest: extra weight.

READING	WHAT YOU FIND	ORDERS
UNDER	Ribs visible at a glance, no fat cover; sharp hip bones; tucked to the extreme.	Increase portion 10%. Recheck in 2 weeks. If he can't gain or is losing fast — vet, not more food (Ch. 8).
IDEAL	Ribs felt, not seen. Visible waist from above. Belly tuck from the side. Moves like he means it.	Hold position. Recheck every 2 weeks. This is the target — defend it.
OVER	Ribs buried — press to find. No waist from above. Belly hangs level. Slower on stairs.	Decrease portion 10%. Recheck in 2 weeks. Cut treats first — they're the silent calories.

DEBRIEF

Why hands instead of a scale? Because weight is a number and condition is the truth. A 30-kilo dog can be lean muscle or soft — same number, different dog. Muscle weighs more than fat, so the scale lies about fitness the same way the bag lies about portions. Your hands read the dog. The scale just reads gravity.

4.2 — ADJUST BY 10%, CHECK EVERY TWO WEEKS

Here is the entire portion program. Three steps. No app required.

► FIELD INTEL — THE PURINA 14-YEAR LIFESPAN STUDY (+1.8 YEARS OF HEALTHY LIFE)

Why is the 2-minute Rib Test the single highest-leverage habit in canine nutrition? In a landmark 14-year longitudinal study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (Kealy et al., 2002, JAVMA), researchers tracked 48 Labrador Retrievers in paired littermates across their entire lives.

Dogs fed to maintain a lean, ideal rib reading (ribs easily felt under a thin cover, visible hourglass waist — a 4–5 on the 9-point WSAVA scale) **lived a median of 1.8 years longer (13.0 years vs. 11.2 years)** and delayed the onset of chronic joint osteoarthritis by more than three years compared to their littermates fed 25% more. Keeping your dog lean isn't a diet — it's buying nearly two extra years together.

STEP 1 — Set the baseline. Start with the bag's chart for your dog's weight — then cut it by about 10–15% on day one. Trust me. The chart runs hot.

STEP 2 — Run the rib test every two weeks. Same day, same time if you can — I do Sundays. Feel the ribs, check the waist, log it. Two weeks is the rhythm because bodies don't change in two days, and they absolutely change in two months if you're not watching.

STEP 3 — Adjust 10% at a time. Trending over? Drop the daily portion 10%. Trending under? Add 10%. Small corrections, often — like steering, not like U-turns. Big swings stress the gut and teach you nothing.

WARNING

Sudden changes earn a vet visit — not a portion change. A dog that drops weight fast, refuses food for more than a day, or balloons up without eating more is not a portion problem. That's a medical problem wearing a portion costume. **No diagnosing from this manual.** Full red lines in Chapter 8.

4.3 — THE SILENT CALORIES

Before you cut the bowl, audit the shadows: training treats, table scraps, the kid's leftovers, the "just one bite" tax. Treats are calories with good PR. Count them. For most pet dogs, treats should stay under a tenth of the day's intake — and every treat above that is a portion cut from the bowl, not a bonus on top of it.

PORTION CHECKLIST

RUN EVERY TWO WEEKS — SUNDAYS WORK

- ☐ **Rib test:** hands flat over ribs — feel, don't see. Record: UNDER / IDEAL / OVER.
- ☐ **Waist check:** visible tuck from above AND from the side.
- ☐ **Treat audit:** count the silent calories — training treats, scraps, handouts.
- ☐ **Adjust:** trending over → -10%. Trending under → +10%. Ideal → hold.
- ☐ **Weigh the food** (kitchen scale, grams) for one week after any change — cups lie.
- ☐ **Log it:** date, rib reading, portion in grams. Two lines. Done.
- ☐ **Red-line scan:** sudden weight/appetite change? → vet, not portion tweak.

DATE	RIB TEST	PORTION (G)	NOTES

K9 WADE FIELD MANUAL // FM-04 THE FUEL PROTOCOL

HYDRATION & RECOVERY

WATER, TIMING, REST

UNGLAMOROUS TRIO

The best food in the world underperforms in a dehydrated dog fed at the wrong time who never rests.

Nutrition chapters get the glory. This chapter gets the results. Water, meal timing, and rest decide how much of the good food your dog actually *uses* — and they're free.

5.1 — WATER: THE FIRST NUTRIENT

Before protein, before fat — water. A dog can survive weeks on short rations. He can't go days without water. Working dogs dehydrate fast: panting dumps water at a shocking rate, and a dog that worked hard in heat can be meaningfully dehydrated before he looks it.

The standard is simple: **fresh water, always available, in a clean bowl.** "Clean" is doing work in that sentence — bowls grow a slimy biofilm in days. Wash the bowl like you'd wash your own glass. If you wouldn't drink from it, don't ask him to.

WADE'S ORDERS — THE WATER STATION DRILL

1. Two stations minimum in a multi-level house — a thirsty dog shouldn't have to climb stairs for water.
2. Dump, scrub, refill daily. Biofilm is real and it's gross.
3. After hard work or heat: offer water in small amounts, repeatedly — not a giant gorge all at once. Let him drink, breathe, drink again.
4. On the road: carry water and a collapsible bowl. A working dog's water supply is logistics, not luck.

5.2 — FEEDING AROUND EXERCISE

Two rules, no exceptions in my kennel:

Never feed right before hard work. A full stomach plus sprinting, jumping, or bite work is asking the gut to do two jobs at once — and in deep-chested breeds, exercising on a full stomach is linked to bloat risk (Chapter 8). Feed at least an hour before serious exercise. Two is better.

Let him cool down before the bowl after work. Panting dog, racing heart — that's not a digestion body, that's a cooling body. Wait until the panting eases and he's settled, usually 30–60 minutes after hard work. Then feed.

5.3 — REST IS PART OF THE PROGRAM

Muscle isn't built during the workout. It's built during the recovery *after* the workout — fueled by the food, assembled during rest. A dog that's always "on" with no downtime is like a unit that never stands down: performance degrades, injuries stack, and the food can't do its job.

Build rest into the week the way you build training into it. Real sleep — not dozing with one eye open while the household chaos swirls. A crate or a quiet corner, a consistent routine, and at least one genuinely easy day per week for the hard workers.

You don't get fit from training. You get fit from recovering from training — and recovery runs on food, water, and sleep.

DEBRIEF

Why do water, timing, and rest multiply the food's value? Because digestion, absorption, and tissue repair are *conditions*, not guarantees. The nutrients have to arrive (food), dissolve into the system (water), at a moment the body can use them (timing), and get built into the dog during downtime (rest). Miss any link and you paid for fuel the dog never burned.

THE DAILY CHEW

WHAT GOES IN MY KENNEL EVERY MORNING

KENNEL STANDARD

Good food covers the basics. A working dog — and an aging dog — needs targeted support where food alone doesn't reach.

Let me be straight with you: kibble, even good kibble, is built for the average dog at maintenance. My dogs aren't average dogs. They're athletes — jumping, sprinting, hitting a sleeve, running drills in heat. And your senior dog isn't average either: he's an old soldier with miles on the joints and a gut that's seen things.

So every morning, alongside the bowl, my dogs get one more thing: **a daily chew** that covers the four systems food alone doesn't fully protect — **joints, gut, skin & coat, and steady energy**.

I'm not going to name a brand in this manual. Brands change; standards don't. Here's the standard — the ingredient list I demand, and why each piece earned its place.

6.1 — JOINTS: GLUCOSAMINE + GREEN-LIPPED MUSSEL

Joints are the number-one reason working dogs retire early and old dogs slow down. Cartilage doesn't regenerate like muscle — once it's worn, it's worn. So the play is *protection*, starting years before there's a problem.

Glucosamine is the classic joint-support compound — a building block of cartilage and joint fluid. It's the reason "joint supplement" exists as a category.

Green-lipped mussel is the upgrade most people haven't heard of: a New Zealand shellfish naturally rich in omega-3s, glucosamine, chondroitin, and antioxidants together — a joint-support package the way nature built it, not a single isolated compound.

Together they cover the joint from two angles: structural support (glucosamine) and the inflammation balance around it (mussel). For a Malinois landing jumps at eighty pounds, that's career insurance. For a senior lab, that's stairs without the negotiation.

6.2 — GUT: SPORE-FORMING PROBIOTICS

The gut is where food becomes dog. If the gut's off, the best bowl in the world passes straight through — and you get the soft stools, the gas, the drama every time the bag changes.

► FIELD INTEL & KENNEL SPEC — GLUCOSAMINE + MSM + GREEN-LIPPED MUSSEL

Complete Joint Triad: In my kennel, I demand **glucosamine, MSM, and green-lipped mussel in every chew** — pairing plant-based **Glucosamine HCl (200 mg)** for cartilage matrix, **MSM (100 mg)** for connective tissue and tendon flexibility, and **New Zealand Green-Lipped Mussel (100 mg, *Perna canaliculus*)** for natural omega-3 joint lubrication.

Clinical Evidence: In randomized, double-blind veterinary clinical trials (**Bierer & Bui, 2002, *Journal of Nutrition***; **Rialland et al., 2013, *Research in Veterinary Science***), dogs supplemented with Green-Lipped Mussel showed statistically significant improvements in joint mobility and weight-bearing comfort over 4 to 8 weeks.

Spore-forming probiotics are the hardy kind. Most probiotics die in stomach acid before they reach the intestine — expensive casualties. Spore-formers arrive armored, survive the trip, and get to work where digestion actually happens: supporting the gut flora that breaks down food, firms stools, and backs the immune system (most of which lives in the gut, by the way).

Result you can see: consistent stools, calmer stomach on transitions, a dog that actually absorbs what you paid for in Chapter 2.

6.3 — SKIN & COAT: SALMON OIL

The coat is the dashboard light. Dull, flaky, itchy — that's the body reporting a problem upstream, usually fat quality or fatty-acid balance.

Salmon oil delivers omega-3 fatty acids (EPA/DHA) in the form dogs use best. It feeds the skin barrier from the inside: less itching, less flaking, a coat with actual gloss. The terrier scratching himself raw at 2 a.m. and the lab shedding tumbleweeds across your floor — both are often asking for exactly this.

DEBRIEF

Why these three together? Because they're the same system wearing different uniforms. Joints, gut, and skin are all *barrier and cushion* tissues — cartilage cushions bone, gut lining barriers the outside world, skin barriers everything else. Support all three and the whole dog runs quieter.

► FIELD INTEL & KENNEL SPEC — 500M CFU SPORE-FORMING PROBIOTICS + QUERCETIN

1. Gut Survival (500 Million CFU): My kennel standard requires **five hundred million CFU of probiotics in every chew** — specifically a 3-strain spore-forming complex (*Bacillus coagulans*, *B. subtilis*, *B. clausii*) paired with prebiotic FOS. Controlled canine trials (**Félix et al., 2010, *British Journal of Nutrition***) confirm that endospore-forming *Bacillus* strains survive low gastric pH and support firmer stool quality.

2. Skin & Seasonal Support: Alongside **Norwegian Salmon Oil** (direct marine EPA/DHA), I look for **Quercetin Dihydrate (50 mg)** — a plant bioflavonoid antioxidant that helps support a normal histamine response and calmer skin during seasonal itching.

6.4 — STEADY ENERGY & HEART: B VITAMINS + COQ10

Energy isn't about being hyper — it's about being *steady*. The dog that rockets for twenty minutes then crashes isn't energetic, he's badly fueled.

B vitamins run the metabolic machinery that turns food into usable energy — the crew in the engine room. **CoQ10** works at the cellular power plants (mitochondria), supporting the heart muscle most of all — and the heart is the hardest-working muscle in the dog.

Together: no jitters, no crash. Just a dog with spark from morning walk to evening settle. The couch potato who "has no energy" is very often a dog whose engine room is understaffed.

6.5 — THE STANDARD: HUMAN-GRADE, MADE IN THE USA

Two more lines on my checklist, and they're about trust, not nutrition:

Human-grade ingredients means the ingredients meet human food standards — not "feed-grade," the lower bar pet food is legally allowed to clear. If it goes in my dogs every morning for years, I want the higher bar.

Made in the USA means manufactured under US quality controls, in facilities that get inspected. Supply-chain accountability. I know where it was made, and so do you.

► FIELD INTEL & FACILITY STANDARD — SQF & GMP CERTIFIED, MADE IN THE USA

The Full Daily Formula: Combining **salmon oil, quercetin, and CoQ10 in the same chew** (10 mg CoQ10 for mitochondrial and heart-muscle energy) plus essential vitamins **A, D3, E, B2, B6, B9, and B12** replaces four separate bottles with one morning habit.

Manufacturing Accountability: Always verify that your daily chew is **scientifically formulated** and **made in the USA, in an SQF and GMP certified facility** (Safe Quality Food & Good Manufacturing Practice standards ensure strict batch purity and label accuracy). Give it **4 to 6 weeks** of daily consistency — joints and coats rebuild on a biological schedule.

If it keeps an eighty-pound Malinois moving like an athlete, imagine what it does for your dog — the senior lab slowing down on the stairs, the terrier with the itchy skin, the couch potato who could use more spark.

That's the whole pitch, and it's not a pitch — it's arithmetic. The working dog is the stress test. If the formula holds up under a Malinois doing bite work in August, it holds up under your dog's life. The joint support that protects an athlete *preserves* a senior. The gut support that keeps a working dog absorbing food through travel and stress *settles* the sensitive stomach at home. The coat support that keeps a working dog's skin intact *quiets* the itchy terrier.

WADE'S ORDERS

1. One chew, every morning, with the bowl. Consistency beats intensity — daily support compounds, occasional support doesn't.
2. Demand the full panel: joint support (glucosamine + green-lipped mussel), gut (spore-forming probiotics), coat (salmon oil), energy + heart (B vitamins + CoQ10).
3. Demand the standard: human-grade ingredients, made in the USA. No mystery sourcing.
4. Give it 30 days before you judge. Joints and coats rebuild on a biological schedule, not an Amazon Prime schedule.

SENIOR DOGS

SLOWING DOWN IS NOT GIVING UP

THE LONG SERVICE

Every dog I ever pulled off the euthanasia list taught me the same thing: the old ones have the most heart. They've just got fewer miles left in the joints.

Here's the truth nobody puts on a bag: aging is not a disease. It's wear. And wear can be managed — slowed, worked around, outmaneuvered. A senior dog doesn't need you to mourn him early. He needs you to adjust the mission to the soldier he's become.

Everything in this manual compounds in the senior years. The protein that built muscle now *preserves* it. The joint support from Chapter 6 now pays out. The rib test from Chapter 4 matters more now than ever. This chapter is about aiming all of it at the old warrior.



FIG. 7-1 — THE OLD WARRIOR: SLOWER ON THE STAIRS DOESN'T MEAN DONE WITH THEM.

7.1 — SHORTER SESSIONS, SAME MISSION

The senior dog still needs work — body and brain. What changes is the *dose*. Twenty-minute walks become two ten-minute walks. The long hike becomes the sniffy stroll (nose work is tiring, and tired is the goal). Fetch becomes three gentle throws instead of thirty rockets.

And add mental work — it's low-impact and high-value. Scatter feeding, puzzle toys, five minutes of easy known commands with big pay. A senior brain that's engaged stays sharper longer, and a tired brain sleeps the deep sleep that rebuilds the body.

The rule: **he tells you the dose**. Bright and bouncy after? Good dose. Flat for hours after? Too much. Adjust next time. He's not being stubborn — he's filing an after-action report. Read it.

7.2 — WEIGHT: EVERY KILO IS INTEREST ON THE JOINT DEBT

This is the single highest-leverage move for a senior dog, and it's not close. Every extra kilo the dog carries is multiplied across every step, every stair, every rise from the floor — on joints that are already worn.

Think of it as debt: the joints took out a loan over a lifetime of landings and sprints, and extra weight is the interest compounding against them. You can't pay down the principal — the wear is done. But you can **stop the interest**. A lean senior moves better, hurts less, and stays mobile longer than a heavy one. Period.

Run the rib test (Chapter 4) monthly on a senior, not just every two weeks — weight creeps with slower metabolism. And be honest about the treats: the old dog has earned every good thing, but love is not measured in biscuits. Measure it in good days.

WADE'S ORDERS — THE SENIOR PROTOCOL

- 1. Keep him moving.** Motion is lotion for old joints. Short, frequent, low-impact walks — every single day. A day with zero movement is a day the stiffness wins.
- 2. Keep him lean (The +1.8 Year Rule).** Rib test monthly. Treats counted. In the 14-year Purina Lifespan Study (*Kealy et al., 2002*), lean dogs lived 1.8 years longer with far less joint wear.
- 3. Support the joints daily.** Glucosamine + MSM + green-lipped mussel (Chapter 6) — the senior years are where daily joint protection pays out.
- 4. Engineer the environment safely.** Rugs on slick floors. A ramp for the car. **Keep bowls at floor level** for large, deep-chested breeds unless your vet specifically prescribes a raised bowl for a medical condition (see the Purdue Bloat Study in Chapter 8).
- 5. Keep the protein up.** Old dogs need quality animal protein to hold muscle mass — don't cut protein with age unless your veterinarian orders it for a specific medical reason.

7.3 — THE MISSION DOESN'T END AT GRAY

Let me tell you about the other end of rescue. Everyone wants the puppy. The eight-year-old shepherd with the gray muzzle and the stiff mornings? He watches the puppies leave, week after week.

And then someone takes him home. And here's what happens, every single time: the good food, the right portion, the joint support, the short daily walks — and three months later that "old dog" is doing things the shelter paperwork said he couldn't do anymore. Not because he's young again. Because nobody had ever actually *fueled* him right.

Slowing down is not giving up. It's a change of pace — and the dog that gets fed, supported, and moved with sense has more good miles in him than anyone guessed.

Your senior dog served you his whole life. The least the mission demands is that you serve him back now — bowl, chew, walk, repeat. Every good day you buy him is a day he earned.

WARNING: FOOD IS NOT MEDICINE

BLOAT, ALLERGIES, THE VET LINE

SAFETY BRIEF — READ ALL OF IT

This manual makes dogs healthier. It does not diagnose, treat, or replace a veterinarian. Know where the manual ends and the vet begins.

I'm a handler, not a vet. Everything before this chapter is about *optimizing a healthy dog*. This chapter is about recognizing the moments when optimization stops and emergency starts — because the dog fed perfectly can still bloat at midnight, and no chapter in this book outranks a veterinarian's hands on your dog.

8.1 — BLOAT: THE MIDNIGHT EMERGENCY

WARNING — GASTRIC DILATATION-VOLVULUS (BLOAT)

Bloat kills fast — sometimes in hours. Deep-chested breeds (shepherds, Danes, boxers, setters, poodles) are at highest risk, but any dog can bloat.

CALL THE EMERGENCY VET IMMEDIATELY IF YOU SEE:

Restlessness and pacing — can't settle, up-down-up-down. **Unproductive retching** — trying to vomit, nothing comes up. **Swollen, tight belly** — the abdomen distends like a drum. Drooling, pale gums, collapse.

Do not wait to see if it passes. Do not try home remedies. Drive. This is the one emergency where minutes genuinely matter.

Lower the odds: feed two smaller meals instead of one big one. No hard exercise for an hour+ after eating (Chapter 5). Slow-feeder bowls for the inhalers. Elevated bowls are debated — ask your vet what's right for your breed. None of this *prevents* bloat; it just refuses to invite it.

8.2 — ALLERGIES VS. INTOLERANCE

Itchy dog? Soft stools on every bag? Before you blame the food, know what you're looking at:

SIGNAL	WHAT IT SUGGESTS	FIELD MOVE
Itchy skin, ears, paws	True food allergy (usually a protein) — or environmental allergies, which are more common.	Vet visit. Food trials need veterinary supervision to mean anything.
Soft stools on new food	Transition too fast, or intolerance — not allergy.	Slow the transition to 10–14 days. If it persists past that, vet.
Gas, occasional loose stool	Intolerance or too-rich food for that gut.	Adjust; support the gut (Ch. 6). Persistent = vet.
Vomiting / diarrhea > 48h	Not a food problem anymore — a medical one.	Vet. Now, not after trying three bags.

► FIELD INTEL — THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY BLOAT STUDIES (GLICKMAN ET AL., 2000, JAVMA)

Veterinary epidemiologist **Dr. Larry Glickman and colleagues at Purdue University (JAVMA, 2000)** conducted the largest prospective studies on **Gastric Dilatation-Volvulus (GDV / bloat)**, tracking more than 1,900 large- and giant-breed dogs. Two findings are critical for every handler:

1. Meal Size & Speed: Feeding a single large daily meal or rapid gulping (aerophagia) significantly increased bloat risk compared to splitting the daily ration into smaller, calmer meals.

2. The Elevated Bowl Warning (Counter-Intuitive Fact): Although raised bowls were once marketed to prevent bloat, the Purdue study found that **feeding large and giant breeds from an elevated (raised) bowl was statistically associated with a significantly higher incidence of bloat.** Keep food bowls at floor level for deep-chested breeds unless your veterinarian explicitly directs otherwise for a diagnosed condition.

8.3 — THE VET LINE: WHEN THE MANUAL STANDS DOWN

Memorize this list. When any of it shows up, this manual is stood down and the vet takes command:

- ☐ **Sudden appetite change** — refuses food 24h+ (or a puppy/small dog 12h+), or ravenous with weight loss.
- ☐ **Rapid weight change** — up or down, unexplained by portions.
- ☐ **Vomiting or diarrhea beyond 48 hours**, any blood in stool or vomit, black tarry stools.
- ☐ **Lethargy that doesn't lift** — the dog that won't get up is reporting a problem.
- ☐ **Bloat signs (8.1)** — emergency, no waiting.
- ☐ **Anything you have to guess about.** If you're unsure whether it's serious, that's the answer: call.

WARNING

No diagnosing from this manual. Not from this chapter, not from the internet, not from the guy at the pet store. Changing bags to treat a medical problem wastes the window where treatment works. **When in doubt, the vet outranks the manual. Every time.**

7-DAY BOWL RESET

THE OPERATION — ONE CHECKLIST PER DAY

OPERATION ORDER

Seven days. One task per day. Twenty minutes max each. At the end, the bowl is audited, the portion is set, the water is fixed, and the daily standard is running.

This is where the manual becomes a mission. Don't try to do it all today — that's how plans die. One day, one objective. Check the box, move on.

DAY 1 — AUDIT THE BAG

- ☐ Pull the label-reading cheat sheet (Chapter 3) and run the 60-second recon on your current bag.
- ☐ Write down: first five ingredients, crude protein %, crude fat %, any mystery words.
- ☐ Verdict: PASS (keep it) or FAIL (start researching a replacement — change bags on a 10–14 day transition, never overnight).

DAY 2 — RUN THE RIB TEST

- ☐ Hands over ribs: feel, don't see. Waist from above, tuck from the side (Chapter 4).
- ☐ Record the reading: UNDER / IDEAL / OVER — and today's date. This is your baseline.
- ☐ Photograph your dog from above and the side. Future you will thank present you.

DAY 3 — SET THE PORTION

- ☐ Take the bag's chart for your dog's weight — cut 10–15% for the starting portion.
- ☐ Adjust for Day 2's reading: trending over → cut another 10%. Under → add 10%.
- ☐ Weigh it in grams on a kitchen scale. Write the number down. Cups lie; grams don't.
- ☐ Audit the silent calories: count daily treats and scraps. Fold them into the 10% treat budget.

DAY 4 — FIX THE WATER STATION

- ☐ Dump every bowl. Scrub out the biofilm. Refill fresh.
- ☐ Two stations minimum if the house has stairs. Top up the travel bowl for the car.
- ☐ Set the rule: bowl washed daily, water always available. Non-negotiable.

DAY 5 — LOCK THE SCHEDULE

- ☐ Set two meal times and hold them daily — dogs run on routine.
- ☐ Apply the exercise rule: no hard work within 1–2 hours after eating; feed 30–60 min after hard work, once cooled down.
- ☐ Slow-feeder bowl for the inhalers. Mealtime is not a race.

DAY 6 — INTRODUCE THE DAILY CHEW

- ☐ Choose a daily chew to the Chapter 6 standard: glucosamine + green-lipped mussel, spore-forming probiotics, salmon oil, B vitamins + CoQ10 — human-grade ingredients, made in the USA.
- ☐ Start with the bowl, every morning. Same time, same ritual — consistency compounds.
- ☐ Note the start date. Judge at 30 days, not 3 — joints and coats rebuild on biology's schedule.

DEBRIEF

Why introduce the chew on Day 6 and not Day 1? Because changing everything at once teaches you nothing. By Day 6 the food, portion, water, and schedule are stable — so anything that improves from here, you can credit to the right change. One variable at a time. That's how you run an experiment on a living dog.

DAY 7 — REVIEW & SET THE RHYTHM

- ☐ Review the week: bag verdict, rib baseline, portion in grams, water stations, schedule, chew start date.
- ☐ Put a recurring reminder: **rib test every two weeks** (monthly for seniors). Adjust 10% as needed.
- ☐ File the cheat sheet and this tracker where you'll see them. The fridge is a fine command post.

BOWL RESET TRACKER

ONE BOX PER DAY — CHECK IT WHEN IT'S DONE

DAY	OBJECTIVE	DONE	NOTES
DAY 1	Audit the bag — 60-second recon, verdict PASS/FAIL	☐	
DAY 2	Rib test — record UNDER / IDEAL / OVER + photos	☐	
DAY 3	Set the portion — grams on a scale, treat audit	☐	
DAY 4	Fix the water station — scrub, refill, two stations	☐	
DAY 5	Lock the schedule — meal times + exercise timing	☐	
DAY 6	Introduce the daily chew — Chapter 6 standard	☐	
DAY 7	Review — set the two-week rib-test reminder	☐	

RIB-TEST LOG — EVERY TWO WEEKS (MONTHLY FOR SENIORS)

DATE	READING	PORTION (G)	ADJUSTMENT

FINAL ORDERS

TRAIN HIM. FEED HIM. KEEP HIM.

END OF FILE FM-04

You now know more about feeding a dog than most people who sell dog food.

Sixty-second label recon. Named protein first. Fat as fuel. The bag's chart as rumor, your hands as truth. Water, timing, rest. One daily chew for joints, gut, coat, and steady energy. Protect the senior. And the red lines that send you to the vet instead of the pet store.

That's the fuel pillar. Run the 7-day reset, keep the two-week rhythm, and the bowl stops being a guess. It becomes what it was always supposed to be: **supply for the mission.**

Train him. Feed him. Keep him. You trained him — now you've fed him. The keeping takes care of itself, one good year at a time.

ONE PRODUCT IN MY KENNEL

Chapter 6 laid out my standard for the daily chew — every ingredient, every reason. Here's the part I usually keep for the kennel:

There is one product in my kennel. One. It's what I use on my own dogs, every morning — the glucosamine and green-lipped mussel for the joints, the spore-forming probiotics for the gut, the salmon oil for the coat, the B vitamins and CoQ10 for steady energy. Human-grade. Made in the USA. The same chew I'd hand you across the kennel fence and say *this is the one*.

If you want to discover the only product Wade uses on his dogs: [\[LINK\]](#).

No hard sell. You've got the manual, the cheat sheet, and the tracker — that's the mission, and it's yours whether you click or not. But if you want the exact standard I hold my own dogs to, it's there.

APPROVED

END OF FILE FM-04 — THE FUEL PROTOCOL

► KENNEL SPEC VERIFICATION — WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON THE LABEL

When you check the daily soft chew Wade Richter uses in his kennel via the link above, here is the exact label specification it meets:

- **Joints & Mobility:** Glucosamine HCl (200 mg), MSM (100 mg), and Green-Lipped Mussel (100 mg) in every chew.
- **Gut & Immunity:** Five hundred million CFU of spore-forming probiotics (*B. coagulans*, *B. subtilis*, *B. clausii* + FOS prebiotic) in every chew.
- **Skin, Coat, Heart & Energy:** Norwegian Salmon Oil, Quercetin (50 mg), and CoQ10 (10 mg) in the same chew + Vitamins A, D3, E, B2, B6, B9 & B12.
- **Quality Standard:** Scientifically formulated · Made in the USA, in an SQF and GMP certified facility. (Allow 4–6 weeks of daily use for full results.)