



Issue Analysis: The Value of Responsible Dog Breeders

There are two issues on which all dog lovers agree. First, dogs deserve a life in a safe, caring, and healthy environment. Second, those who treat dogs in a negligent or cruel manner should be held accountable.

The American Kennel Club (AKC) takes a strong line on animal cruelty, including implementing a policy that suspends AKC privileges for anyone convicted of animal cruelty involving dogs. The AKC is also the only registry that has a significant Investigations and Inspections program to ensure that people who register litters with the AKC raise their dogs in a humane manner.

The AKC plays an active role in the debate surrounding breeders, and works to ensure that those who treat dogs irresponsibly or inhumanely are held responsible for their actions, while ensuring that the rights of responsible owners and breeders are protected.

What is a Responsible Breeder?

One of the most effective ways to ensure that dogs are placed in safe, loving environments is to support responsible dog breeders. Local communities should consider responsible breeders an asset, as they are in a unique position to mentor new dog owners and provide advice and detailed information about the dogs they own and sell.

Responsible breeders are experts in their breed, and know the pedigree of the dogs they sell. They can tell potential buyers about the temperament, health, and other characteristics unique to the



Bearded Collies celebrating the holidays at their breeders' Michigan home. All the dogs owned by this kennel are taught basic manners from an early age. Their breeder is an AKC Canine Good Citizen® Evaluator.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARYANN AND JACK SZALKA, AFTER DARK BEARDED COLLIES. USED WITH PERMISSION.

ers to ensure dogs are not abandoned in shelters, but rather placed in safe, loving environments.

Being a responsible dog breeder is truly a labor of love that comes with a significant price tag. Few if any responsible breeders get wealthy raising dogs, as the money made from puppy sales goes into kennel improvements and basic dog care. Responsible dog breeders breed because they love their chosen breed(s) and are willing to dedicate their lives and resources to raising quality dogs.

puppy they are considering. Many breeders devote their entire lives to developing a line or pedigree of dogs that meet specific temperament, performance, and health standards. Many also breed dogs for specific purposes, such as hunting,

More than a Numbers Game

Every profession from accountants and lawyers to doctors and teachers has a few "bad apples" that tarnish the reputation of an otherwise respectable profession. Unfortunately dog breeding is no exception.

Thankfully, these few irresponsible breeders comprise a very small minority of an otherwise unique and special profession. Those who do breed or care for dogs in an irresponsible or cruel

manner must be punished under the law, but the term "irresponsible" must be carefully defined.

An unfortunate but common trend is to equate the term "irresponsible" with the number of dogs – particularly females – someone owns. There is an unfortunate tendency among individuals unfamiliar with animal husbandry and best practices in animal care to assume that keeping large numbers of dogs automatically equates to poor and inhumane care. The number of animals owned has never correlated with the level of care.

Many agriculture groups have part-

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search and rescue, therapy, and assistance for the disabled.

When responsible breeders sell a puppy, they ensure these dogs are placed in good homes by implementing a screening process for potential buyers and following up after the purchase. Breeders often take dogs back if they are not in an ideal situation and place them in new homes, as in the case of “Bo”, the First Family’s Portuguese Water Dog. All of the AKC national breed parent clubs have rescue programs for their breeds. Parent club rescues are often comprised of AKC breeder volunteers who work with local animal control officers or individual own-

nered with the AKC throughout the United States to fight legislation that places an arbitrary cap on animal ownership. They know that historically as well as today, the great kennels—like the great horse farms or cattle ranches—have maintained and provided excellent care to large numbers of animals.

Just as there are excellent owners of 100 dogs, there are negligent owners of one dog. Simply reducing the number of animals a person or business may own will not automatically make them a better or more humane owner. There is no magic number that will suddenly make someone a better dog owner or breeder. Arbitrary numerical caps completely miss the underlying issue—owner responsibility.

Animal ownership limits can actually create more problems for dogs and the community at large. Limits can force caring, responsible owners to relinquish dogs to a local shelter simply to comply with an arbitrary ownership cap. These dogs are then housed or euthanized at great expense to local taxpayers.

Recent stories from England cite concerns with animal inbreeding. Legislation introduced in a number of states in 2009 also addressed this issue. Ownership limits can actually perpetuate this problem. In fact, one of the best ways to avoid inbreeding in pure-bred dogs is to ensure that breeders have the ability to own enough dogs so they can make the best possible breeding decisions for the health and well-being of their breed and their pedigrees.

A Matter of Enforcement

There is no question that those who treat dogs in an inhumane manner should be punished. Each of the 50 states, as well as the United States Code, outlaw animal negligence and cruelty. When tragic stories of animal cruelty and irresponsible breeding come to light, they almost always result in charges under existing law being brought against the individual or business responsible.

The problem is not an absence of laws, but rather a lack of enforcement or the resources to properly enforce existing

laws. Many states and local communities simply do not have the manpower or money necessary to adequately enforce existing laws.

There have been many attempts across the country in 2009 to further regulate dog breeders, including requiring warrantless inspections of private homes without probable cause as well as impractical and arbitrary standards of care. Not only do such provisions violate the rights of responsible, law-abiding citizens, they are also ineffective and unenforceable. The problem is more complex than simply creating new laws – it requires the ability and will to enforce the laws against negligence and cruelty that are already on the books. A “quick fix” of



AUSTRALIAN CATTLE DOGS

“Ownership limits are arbitrary and do not address the underlying issue of owner responsibility.”

adding new laws will not change or improve a lack of enforcement and may only divert resources from much-needed enforcement operations.

At the federal level, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has regularly strengthened the standards for humane care and treatment of dogs and other animals owned by those regulated by the Animal Welfare Act. The AKC supports the strong enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, as well as an increase in the number of USDA enforcement personnel.

An Effective Solution

Breeder and owner responsibility cannot be defined by establishing arbitrary

ownership limits or unenforceable breeding requirements. Instead, responsibility should be defined by the quality of care given to the animals. This is why the American Kennel Club works with dog owners, breeders, and community leaders throughout the country to educate the public about responsible dog ownership (See p. 3 for an article on our annual nationwide Responsible Dog Ownership Day events). The AKC also encourages responsible breeding practices by supporting educational symposia for breeders and competitive dog shows and other events where top breeders showcase and compete with the best of their breeding programs. The AKC Canine Health Foundation has allocated over \$22 million

to research studies focusing on helping dogs live longer, healthier lives.

Where legislative fixes are needed, the AKC is pleased to assist in bringing community leaders and responsible breeders together to create positive, effective solutions. For example, the Indiana General Assembly introduced legislation in 2009 that limited animal ownership, included many arbitrary care and condition policies, and allowed for warrantless inspections of private homes and property. The AKC worked with responsible Hoosier dog owners, breeders, and key legislators to identify the real issues.

Together, this group succeeded in closing the loopholes in Indiana’s animal cruelty statutes and creating a bill that solely addressed the issues of irresponsible dog breeding in their state.

For over 125 years, the AKC has been dedicated to well-being of dogs. We support and value the responsible owners and breeders who breed and raise our cherished pets and beloved working dogs. Responsible breeders are an important asset and educational resource in our communities. Through educational programs and enforcement of existing laws, we can punish those who harm animals while recognizing that responsible breeders who devote their lives to their dogs are part of the solution, not the problem.