

## What is a Hobby Breeder?

*Note: this is written from the perspective of dog breeder hobbyists. While the same ethical principles apply to a hobby breeder's management of a breeding program for dogs or cats, there are some differences in dog and cat breeding practices, such as the appropriate times to breed, that are specific to each species.*

Hobby Breeders are dedicated to the preservation of a particular breed of dog or cat.

We do not mass-produce animals. We do not breed our female animals at every estrus throughout their lives. We rarely make any profit from breeding a litter of kittens or puppies. Hobby breeders do not "make a living" from their endeavors and very few even derive a significant portion of their income from breeding their animals. Our litters do not buy us fancy boats or exotic vacations. We feel we've done well if a litter "pays for itself," and occasionally there's a bit left over to buy new equipment or even attend a competition we would have skipped otherwise. There's nothing wrong with a breeder making a profit, of course, but it isn't the primary goal.

We test our potential breeding animals for known adverse conditions they might pass on to their offspring, to the extent that tests are available (DNA and other laboratory analyses, x-rays, physical exams by veterinarians with expertise in a condition). Some tests must be repeated annually to determine whether a late-developing condition has appeared. Even conditions that may not affect the animal's suitability as a pet and its quality of life are of concern to the breeder.

While tests do not yet exist for every condition in every breed, we support research to find a means of identifying heritable adverse conditions within our breeds so we can reduce occurrences in our litters. *The same adverse conditions sometimes found in purebred dogs and cats are also present in mixed-breed animals if the ancestors had them.* The breeding of purebreds does not create "genetic defects" and the crossing of breeds within a species does not eliminate them. Hobby Breeders are knowledgeable about their breed's health issues and take responsibility to breed away from them.

Purebred breeders carefully select breeding animals for traits established by a "breed standard" adopted by a national parent club for that breed and endorsed by a national registry organization. Physical appearance, temperament, and health and longevity of parents and ancestors are taken into consideration when planning a breeding. Breeders research the pedigree and health clearances of potential mates – hobby breeders do not mate just any two animals that happen to be of the same breed.

When a litter is produced, it is carefully raised in an appropriate physical environment. Veterinary care, socialization, exercise, good nutrition, and training are essential elements of raising a healthy litter. Hobby breeders generally sell pets with a requirement that those not of breeding quality will be spayed or neutered (S/N) by their new owners when they reach an appropriate age. Healthy pets must reach a certain level of physical maturity before they can safely be altered - juvenile S/N can interfere with the normal growth of a pet and predispose it to abnormal bone development, incontinence, and illnesses including certain cancers in later life.

Hobby breeders often keep one or more of the puppies in a litter that has the potential to grow into a future show prospect and/or compete in performance activities appropriate to the breed. Many dog breeds were developed specifically to perform work such as herding and hunting, and their ability to do this is demonstrated in field trials governed by the registry organizations and by actually working at this job with owners who hunt or keep livestock.

A Hobby Breeder's next generation can't be determined immediately, and those that appear to have potential for future breeding are raised by the breeder for several months, or placed with other knowledgeable breeders, so structure and temperament can be assessed and health clearances begun. In some breeds, exams can't determine the absence or presence or degree of a potentially adverse health condition until the animal is fully mature – and this can be at least two years in some breeds. Thus, Hobby Breeders often have adult intact animals that have not been, and may never be used for breeding. Many Hobby Breeders don't consider using an animal for breeding, regardless of its pedigree and health clearances, unless it can demonstrate its superior quality in the show ring and/or performance arena, or by "doing its job" in real-life conditions.

Most Hobby Breeders belong to clubs on a local or national level that have a Code of Ethics whose provisions they follow. Typical elements include:

- Puppies are sold directly to carefully screened buyers, not through brokers or pet stores.
- Pet-quality animals will be sold with spay/neuter contracts, and on limited registration or without registration until evidence of S/N is provided to the breeder.
- Puppies/kittens will have age-appropriate immunizations and other veterinary care before they are transferred to a new owner.
- Buyers will be given documentation including the pedigree, health history, and instructions for care and training of their new companion; the breeder will assist the buyer in dealing with problem behavior, health care issues, and other concerns that may arise.
- Throughout the pet's lifetime, the breeder will accept the return of the pet they bred or assist in re-homing it if the owner cannot keep it – for any reason.

Hobby Breeders do not want their puppies/kittens in homes where they won't be good companions because of size, personality, physical requirements, and other breed traits, so we screen potential buyers and offer continuing support to those we sell to. We do not want the pets we produce to be given to shelters or rescue organizations because there wasn't a good match between breed and buyer, or because the buyer's circumstances change due to illness, relocation, divorce, or any lifestyle factor that may affect their ability to keep a pet. Many of us volunteer at our local animal shelters, foster and re-home pets for our breed's rescue group, or contribute financial support to these efforts.

We value our animals. They are not neglected or abused, or allowed to be a nuisance to our neighbors or a danger to our communities. Just as people who ski, sail, or play golf may make substantial investments in order to enjoy their hobby, we have chosen to raise and show our dogs and cats because of the enjoyment they give us and our commitment to their well-being and the continuation of quality in their particular breed.