

Purebred dogs – the next endangered species

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Yes, in the US there is a looming dog shortage. Remarkably, there are several reports concerning the predicted shortage of dogs available for consumers. I personally breed Pembroke Welsh Corgis and receive several requests a week for a puppy. Clients that contact me are frustrated by not being able to find the breed they are looking for.

My clients who have purpose-bred dogs – purebred and “designer” dogs all have waiting lists. There are phone calls and Facebook posts that go viral as soon as a pregnancy is announced. None end up in shelters, rescues and on Craig’s List. Our shelters are NOT filled with purebred or purpose bred dogs. The shrinking numbers seen in shelters and rescues are mixed breed dogs, frequently of mixed bully breed types.

The comments here do not apply to cats – it is clear that while we have done an impressive job in reducing the unwanted and unplanned dog population, the same does not hold true for cats. It is also clear that there are significant regional differences in the number of dogs in shelters and rescues who are in need of finding a permanent home. Many dogs from the southern tier of states are being rehomed after being transported to the northern tier of states. Many of the southern shelters and rescues have a steady relationship of northern shelters as their outlet. Dogs in shelters in the northern states are less likely to be euthanized than in southern states. In Nevada, they have volunteers in rescues and shelters who don’t walk and socialize dogs, they spend their day on the phone looking for dogs. Some shelters have volunteers who physically visit other sources to cherry-pick the most adoptable dogs.

Some of our great challenges in reporting pet population data and consumer needs are that we don’t have birth and death records on dogs and cats. Banfield has a lot of data but most of their patients are spayed and neutered. Data from European countries include a large population of intact dogs and cats.

The Washington Post February 8, 2017 issue entitled “**Does America have enough dogs for all the people who want one?**” raised the question based on data.

There are many sources of data – with conflicting information.

A new study by researchers at the Mississippi State College of Veterinary Medicine was led by Dr. Kimberly Woodruff, Shelter Medicine Service Chief at Mississippi State College of Veterinary Medicine and David R. Smith, a professor in pathobiology and population medicine.

This study showed the number of dogs euthanized in American animal shelters has dropped from an estimated 12 million dogs per year to fewer than 780,000 per year. Even 780,000 dogs is a number no one is going to say is acceptable, IF these dogs are acceptable pets. Increasingly, the only dogs being euthanized are either very sick, badly injured, or too dangerous to place as pets. That represents a 95% decrease – very impressive. This low number may reflect that all adoptable dogs are finding homes.

This study found that and that shelters take in more than 5.5 million dogs each year. The remainder are returned to their owners, transferred to other rescues or shelters or adopted, the researchers found.

US animal shelters are taking in — and saving — many more dogs than previously believed. The Mississippi State study also suggests that euthanasia estimates by the Humane Society of the United States and the No Kill Advocacy Center, both of which estimate that about 2.5 million animals are killed in shelters each year, may be based in large part on animals other than dogs.

The Mississippi study was funded by the [Pet Leadership Council](#), which represents organizations including the American Kennel Club and the American Pet Products Association; PetSmart and other large retail stores; and the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, which is the legislative and lobbying voice of the pet industry.

Clearly, the pet industry has a different agenda than HSUS. There are increasing numbers of municipalities who restrict the sale of dogs through pet stores. The same limitations may not be currently limiting shelter and rescue dog sales.

Advertising by Animal Rights groups would lead us to believe that every shelter is overflowing with dogs. The reality is many are not – they are struggling to keep enough dogs to stay open and justify their existence. Without dogs being trafficked from other sources, these shelters would be forced to close. On Monday mornings, before dogs are transported, many shelters have very low dog inventories.

- a. In a study funded by The Pet Leadership Council as a follow-up to a survey it previously commissioned on dog ownership rates and where people get their dogs, it determined that 44 percent of U.S. households have a dog, different data than published by the AVMA (see below). The Animal Policy Group, ([lobbying group](#)) led by Mark Cushing, that advises the council then used that to extrapolate — based on average dog lifespan of 11 years generating a 9% replacement rate annually, U.S. Census data and typical dog-purchase behavior — that Americans wanted 8 million dogs (8,024,733) in 2016 and will want more than 9.2 million by 2036.

It appears that at the current rates, U.S. shelters won't be able to meet Americans' demand for 8 million dogs a year.

AVMA DATA From 2012:

Companion animals

	Dogs	Cats	Birds	Horses
Percent of households owning	36.5%	30.4%	3.1%	1.5%
Number of households owning	43,346,000	36,117,000	3,671,000	1,780,000
Average number owned per household	1.6	2.1	2.3	2.7
Total number in United States	69,926,000	74,059,000	8,300,000	4,856,000
Veterinary visits per household per year (mean)	2.6	1.6	0.3	1.9
Veterinary expenditure per household per year (mean)	\$378	\$191	\$33	\$373
Veterinary expenditure per animal (mean)	\$227	\$90	\$14	\$133
Lifespan?	11 years			
2019 estimates from the Animal Policy Group	88,000,000	90,000,000		

Current US dog sources are:

- i. Friend/neighbor = 34%
- ii. Animal shelter = 26% = 2.6 million

- iii. Small local breeder = 22% - AKC breeders 1.2 million, hobby breeders – 1.8 million = 5.8 million

These numbers represent a deficit 2.3 million. What are the sources? Either there is a shortage – increasing price of purchasing dogs or the foreign imports are greater than people think.

Another source of data is the National Animal Interest Alliance Shelter Project.

<http://shelterproject.naiaonline.org>. This project is a program dedicated to further reducing the number of adoptable pets that are euthanized in our shelters. This organization is funded by donations and the World Pet Association.

Pet ownership habits have changed dramatically over the last several decades. Public education, spay/neuter programs, widespread vaccination campaigns, permanent pet identification, the formation of dog and cat rescue groups, feral cat organizations and a host of other developments have combined with improved shelter practices and reasonable pet laws to drastically reduce pet euthanasia and create a better world for dogs and cats in the US. Practically every aspect of pet ownership has improved, from acquisition, to socialization and training, confinement practices and finally to lifelong pet owner commitments.

The NAIA shelter project was developed to track these advances and provide information about shelter issues to interested parties. The centerpiece of this project is the collection and publication of shelter data. NAIA has a volunteer full-time individual who spends 40 hours a week gathering shelter statistics that show the number of dogs and cats impounded, returned to their owners, adopted out or euthanized.

There are an estimated 7,100 shelters in the US. By collecting data on a shelter by shelter basis, NAIA hopes to eventually present overview information for entire cities, counties, metropolitan areas, states and regions. The data is collected on a yearly basis and graphed for viewing when a minimum of 5 years of data has been obtained. Shelter links that do not show graphs are shelters for which we have data, but not enough to graph. Only by having access to accurate data can we as a society understand pet population trends.

It is important to understand that there are inherent problems with shelter data - so much so - that for many years projects designed to collect and represent such data faltered. Some shelters don't have the resources to perform their basic jobs and track such data. Some shelters don't feel comfortable releasing information about pet euthanasia to the public because on its face it can be misunderstood and misused. Shelters, especially private humane societies that depend on public donations have often been unfairly criticized for euthanizing dogs and cats, even when they were performing euthanasia to prevent suffering, or to fulfill local animal control contracts and laws.

Complicating matters further, data may not be uniform. In some cases, dogs and cats may be counted multiple times as they enter, exit, and transfer to other rescues or shelters. There may be input errors, incomplete years and a host of other problems. A few shelters distinguish between euthanasia requests made by owners when relinquishing a sick, old or aggressive pet and the euthanasia decisions made by shelter personnel based on lack of space and list them separately. Although there is a legitimate basis for distinguishing among such categories, wherever NAIA has observed this, they have added the two categories together so that the total can be compared against similar shelter data sets where these numbers are combined.

As NAIA gathers and maintains this additional information, though, because it adds to our overall knowledge, even though we choose more uniform data for our graphs. Even when data entry is accurate and meets our basic requirements, there are other complicating factors. Without additional data showing human population variations over time, shelter data may convey an incomplete or misleading picture. In areas where the human population is exploding, slight increases in the number of pets impounded and euthanized may still reflect an overall decline in the number of pets euthanized per 1000 people, which shelter data alone will not show. To see shelter data in relation to human populations, be sure to scroll to the bottom of the list on the menu on the left.

No matter how good the data is, it's still difficult to make meaningful apples to apples comparisons between shelters. Different parts of the country suffer from different kinds of problems that need to be taken into account. In areas where winters are especially harsh or coyotes and other predators are plentiful, feral cats may not pose a shelter problem. In inner city environments though, where predators are few and the climate is mild, such as Southern California, feral cats may pose an enormous challenge to animal control's resources. In areas where terrestrial rabies exists, like in parts of the Northeastern US, stray animals may pose additional public health concerns.

NAIA has decided that gathering and providing the available data, such as it is, is better than providing no data due to its lack of uniformity or inherent weaknesses. NAIA's goals are that veterinarians and society will find this resource useful, utilize it wisely, recognize its limitations and contribute to the growing shelter data base so that it will become more useful over time.

In most cases individual shelters are the source of data. In some cases, the data comes from state mandated programs which are controlled by public health or agriculture departments. In a few other cases, we've used data supplied by animal welfare coalitions, which are in the public domain.

As a veterinary community, we have to address some of the following concerns:

1. Pets are still property. Calling dogs and cats fur babies and referring to purchases as adoptions may be setting us up for legal concerns. If pets become legal family members, our practices will be forced to dramatically change. Owners may not be able to euthanize pets for economic reasons. Owners may not be able to euthanize pets for cases with predicted futile outcomes. We may see pets suffering in numbers and from conditions that at this time are unconscionable. Clients may be forced to decide between paying enormous amounts of money for pet care instead of buying food for their children. Worse yet, we may find clients fear coming to the veterinary hospital and instead leave pets home to suffer before they die.
2. As long as pets are property, our malpractice insurance will remain affordable. If pets become family members, we may be forced to provide more "cover your behind" services and practices.

When discussing the status of pets as property, we need to understand some legal principles – infliction of emotional distress and consortium.

- a. When a person loses a family member and sues for intentional or negligent infliction of emotional distress, they can only receive this for an immediate family member – a parent, child or spouse. If you are engaged to be married and your fiancé dies on the way to the ceremony, you are not a family member and cannot receive these benefits. There is a lot of debate as to whether a pet has a closer relationship to their owner than a fiancé. (You may like your fiancé more than you like your spouse.)
 - b. Loss of consortium – does not refer to a friendship you have with your spouse. It refers to a sexual relationship. This is not a relationship we ordinarily have with our pets.
3. An increasing number of dogs being placed in client's homes from shelters and rescues have significant and sometimes dangerous behavior concerns.
2. Purchases from shelters and rescues “can’t be our only option when it comes to helping Americans find their ideal, lifelong companions,” Mike Bober, CEO and President of PIJAC said. “Responsibly bred puppies are an essential part of the equation.”
 3. Clients have the need to purchase and live with predictable pets. Because of lifestyle, personal preferences and physical limitations, clients should have the opportunity to purchase a dog with predictable traits, size, behaviors, coats, activity levels, and life span. When they are selecting a pet that they will live with for the next 18 years, making a good decision when obtaining a pet will reduce the likelihood that the pet will require rehoming during the client’s lifespan.
 4. Without local sources of dogs bred by US commercial breeders and competition breeders, we are going to see a demand for dogs that can only be met by sources outside of the US. This has the potential to lead to:
 - a. Illegally imported dogs. This has been happening at the rate of millions - untold numbers of dogs coming into the US without health clearances and vaccinations. They are coming in on cargo ships, private planes, and smuggled in across borders in cars. Some come home with people returning from military service and vacation. Dogs with rabies, canine brucellosis, and other previously eradicated or unknown diseases including zoonotic diseases are predictably being brought into the US. This puts our current dog population as well as unsuspecting humans at a health risk.
 - b. Dogs moving from the southern tier of states are regularly populating northern states with diseases not previously frequently seen. Heartworm disease and canine brucellosis are prime examples.
 - c. Dogs coming from other countries that are purpose bred will not be produced by parents with appropriate health screenings and may be raised in conditions that are substandard and over which we as a society have no control. At this time, purpose-bred dogs in the US are coming from breeders who are doing health screenings, working hard to socialize their puppies, and under conditions regulated by the USDA and local authorities.
 - d. Dogs coming without a breeder attached to them – when dogs are purchased from local breeders, our clients can reach the breeders to help with understanding health concerns and simple things like housebreaking, lightening our load on client education as well as improving the chance that the dog will not end up in rescue or a shelter. Only a small

percentage of dogs in shelters, according to the data, are not pure-bred purpose bred dogs. Most are strays or surrenders of mixed-breed backgrounds.

- e. Rescue organizations are suspected of already beginning to breed dogs intentionally. Some have discovered that producing a litter of pups and promoting their need for a home is a great tool for fund-raising.

From a consumer’s perspective, what does the future of dog ownership look like?

From a veterinarian’s perspective, what does your financial future look like if we can’t meet the consumer’s needs for pet ownership? How will you pay your school loans off and own a practice if there aren’t enough dogs to go around. A cat as a dog substitute may not work for everyone – its tough to go jogging or hunting with a cat.

In past generations, people got married, had a few children, and when they kids begged for a dog, they got one or two. When the kids left home, some people were relieved and liked an empty nest while others needed another dog or several to fill the void.

In our current generation of millennials, they live together, get a dog or cat, see if they can keep it alive and stay together, then have a child and maybe then they will get married.

Key subgroups of pet ownership:

By Region			By income	
Pacific	39%		<30,000	43%
Mountain			\$30,000-49,000	41%
North Central	46%		\$50,000-\$99,000	56%
South	44%		>\$100,000	46%
Northeast	39%			

Fate of dogs in shelters	Percent	Raw Number		
Returned to owners	18%	969,443 dogs		
Transferred to other shelters	14%	778,382		
Homed	47%	2,630,000		
Euthanized	14%	776,970		
Other	7%	379,994		

Proposed solutions to the looming dog shortage:

1. Hobby breeders – hope these breeders – 1/3 of them – can this be doubled and should it be doubled?
2. Imports – do we want to be an importing society? The exporters are not the premier animal welfare sources
3. Commercial breeding – classified as puppy mills – we don’t have kids in high school raising their hands saying I want to be a commercial dog breeders. We have 75 land grant universities – with husbandry programs and only 1 has a program studying breeding of dogs. Should we bring academia into this world and make dog breeding an acceptable career?
4. Promote cats as dog substitutes.

262 cities and 3 states have banned selling commercially bred dogs.

- iv. How can dogs be relocated from areas of excess to areas of shortages?
There is a systematic process to move dogs.
- v. What is the impact on the veterinary community when dogs are relocated on the spread of disease. Rabies as an example. Vets with their relationships with shelters are valuable.
- vi. Dogs are going to Mexico for vaccinations and are being promoted as vaccinated dogs but the US does not recognize rabies from Mexico as a valid vaccination
 - 1. Brucellosis
- vii. Vets need to be at the receiving end of the transport to be sure the dogs are health screened before moving. Shelter medicine programs are in a position to help with this. Example – Puerto Rico – in the news. We are in a new era of veterinary students understanding epidemiological aspects of shelter medicine. This is a growing program.

References: Patti Strand and Mark Cushing – presentations and publications.