

HOW MUCH MONEY DO BREEDERS MAKE?

by Anne V. McGuire

People seeking to purchase a pet quality puppy are often astounded to hear that prices are in the range of \$700-\$1000 for a pet puppy. They think that the breeders must be raking in the money hand over fist. Reputable breeders are quick to respond that breeding in a responsible manner costs money and most reputable breeders lose money on a litter of puppies.

But how much DOES it cost to breed and raise a litter of puppies in a reputable and responsible manner? The following is an accounting of the expenses involved in the breeding of our Golden Retriever, Sierra. She had 10 puppies, and they went to their new homes when they were 7 weeks (49 days) old. The year was 1995 and Sierra was 3 years old then.

FIRST, the veterinary exams to determine that the bitch was free of the common hereditary health problems in her breed (hip dysplasia, cataracts, PRA, SAS):

OFA prelim for bitch, at 1.5 yrs. age: \$70
CERF at 1.5 yrs age: \$20 + \$7.50 CERF registration fee
Cardiac exam and color Doppler ultrasound: \$150
OFA at 2 yrs age: \$70 + \$35 OFA fee
CERF at 3 yrs age, preceding breeding: \$20
PennHip at clinic discount rate: \$30 (normally about \$150 here)

Other health tests:

2 VWD tests, 1 yrs apart: \$70 & \$20
Thyroid test: \$20

NEXT, the pre-breeding and breeding & pregnancy expenses themselves:

Pre-breeding physical exam & shots update for bitch: \$80
Brucellosis test: \$20
Stud Fee: \$500
Travel costs to drive bitch from Houston to Chicago, 5 days stay in Chicago for breeding: \$500
2 vet visits during pregnancy for general health exam and palpation: \$30 each
1 x-ray in last week of pregnancy (no ultrasound): \$35

We had 10 puppies whelped Dec. 15, 1995 from 12:08am to 7:10am:

1 post-birth vet visit for bitch and puppies, including pit shot and antibiotics for bitch: \$90
Wormer for puppies, at 3 weeks & 5 weeks: \$20 each
Puppy Shots at 5 weeks and 7 weeks: total of \$40

TEN 40lb bags of premium food consumed by mother and puppies from birth to 7 weeks age: \$40 per bag times 10 (for a while there she was eating 12 cups a day!)

IN addition, at 6-7 weeks before the pups went home, we did:

Cardiac exams at Texas A&M vet school: \$10 each times 10 puppies
Eye exams on the 6 show prospects: \$20 each times 6

COSTS involved in raising the litter of 10 puppies:

Fee to list litter with local club Puppy Referral service: \$50

Extra cost to heat house to 80 degrees for 2 weeks during the winter, add extra \$30 to one month's electric bill

Laundry detergent: about \$10 a week times 7 weeks

Paper towels, 2 cases of 12 rolls each: about \$15

Other cleaning supplies, Chlorox, etc.: about \$100

Blankets for whelping box bedding: \$20

Long distance phone charges for interviewing out of town puppy buyers: \$150

Local long distance charges for the 2 co-breeders to talk, since we're in different local area codes: \$400 for the 7 weeks

Photocopying and postage to mail out copies of clearances to prospective buyers, and to assemble copies of clearances and pedigrees for buyers, etc: \$200

OK, so far we've spent about \$3,500 ... YES that's right... three THOUSAND, five hundred dollars to breed and raise this litter. We were lucky -- there were no major problems, no Caesarean section, no midnight rush to the emergency clinic to save a puppy's life. Our costs could have been MUCH higher!

BACK to the accounting: Consider that almost ALL that \$3,500 was spent BEFORE the puppies were 7 weeks old. We collected \$100 deposits from 6 of the buyers at whelping time ... we had \$600 cash income to cover \$3,500 in expenses for those 7 weeks until the balance of the puppy purchase prices were paid. Would-be-breeders often forget that the expenses in raising a litter must be paid BEFORE the puppies are bought and paid for!!! Would-be-breeders need to plan on having several thousand dollars, AT LEAST, available before doing the breeding, and they need to be prepared to lose all that money. Its entirely possible to spend up to \$1500 just on the breeding, only to find that your bitch is NOT pregnant and there will be NO puppy income. A major medical complication could leave you with a \$2000 vet bill, no living puppies, and a dead bitch.

SIERRA's LITTER -- the INCOME: The breeder kept one puppy and we, the co-breeders kept one. One puppy went out on a co-ownership agreement for \$0 price. So 7 puppies were sold, 5 on pet spay/neuter contracts at \$500 each, and 2 on show contracts at \$650 (USA) each. That's \$3,800 income, minus \$3,500 expenses = \$300 "profit." Note that if your bitch or the stud dog do not have any titles, show accomplishments, or other proof of their breeding quality it is highly likely that you will NOT find buyers willing to pay more than \$300 per puppy, reducing you to a LOSS of about \$1400 or more on a litter.

WAIT! We're not done with the expenses yet: We owe the State sales tax on the puppy income – 6% of \$3,800 is \$228. So now our remaining profit is \$72 on which we will have to pay federal income tax!!! From this grand money-making venture we have barely enough profit to pay to have our bitch spayed so we're not tempted to try this form of bankruptcy again!!!

One less puppy or a C-section or other medical emergency and we'd have had a ZERO profit, and that's without considering the following:

Costs NOT included in the above account, but incurred none the less would include: the purchase price of the bitch when SHE was a puppy (\$500), the cost of raising her for 3 years before this breeding, the cost of training and showing her to determine if she rated as "breeding quality".

And there is the value of the TIME put into raising these puppies: one of the co-breeders used up 3 weeks of her paid vacation time for this litter (no more vacation time for her this year) and about 1 week

UNPAID vacation time. Don't forget that EVERY single weekend for 7 weeks was spent with the puppies interviewing and entertaining buyers. Not to mention getting up hours early to take care of the litter before going to work, time lost at work because of the need to come home early to tend puppies, and spending each and every awake hour in the evenings tending puppies. Better add about \$200 extra cost of living because we ate a lot of expensive fast food, etc. to save time and to save our sanity, thus upping our cost of living during this venture.

It was mentally and physically EXHAUSTING. Was it worth all that work for \$72 profit --- NO WAY!!! Was it worth all that work to know that we bred a quality bitch to a quality sire and have produced healthy, well-socialized puppies that are a joy to their owners, and hopefully will make a significant contribution to the improvement of the breed? Yes, I think so.

Had we just wanted another puppy, it would have been FAR easier, far less draining, and probably in the long run, less expensive to just buy a puppy from a reputable breeder!

And factor in one of the stiffest prices to pay ... that price Sierra pays in the future -- research shows that a bitch who has even one litter has a 1 in 4 (25%) chance of getting breast cancer, which will most likely kill her. Breast cancer is the 2nd greatest killer of female dogs ... only euthanasia kills more. If a bitch is spayed before her 1st heat, she has a less than 0.5% chance of ever getting breast cancer. If she comes in heat even ONCE, she has about a 1 in 7 chance of getting breast cancer. It was one of the hardest parts of deciding to keep Sierra intact and breed her ... knowing that we may have doomed her to death by breast cancer. Sierra's mother died of mammary cancer – have I condemned her to the same fate by NOT spaying when she was young? It is the bitches themselves who may pay the ultimate price for breeding.

[Author's Note: The above prices were those for breeding a litter in 1995. Since then many costs have gone up significantly, particularly the costs of veterinary care and of transporting a bitch to the stud dog.]

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