

Know the Facts BEFORE Breeding Your Dog

by Bonnie Wilcox D.V.M.

We think it is extremely important to learn the facts and possible consequences in advance if you are contemplating breeding your dog. In today's overcrowded world, we, the wardens of our domestic pets, must make responsible decisions for them and for ourselves. The following points should be reviewed carefully.

QUALITY: AKC registration is NOT an indication of quality. Most dogs, even purebred, should not be bred. Many dogs, though wonderful pets, have defects of structure, personality or health that should not be perpetuated. Breeding animals should be proven free of these defects BEFORE starting on a reproductive career. Breeding should only be done with the goal of IMPROVEMENT -- an honest attempt to create puppies better than their parents. Ignorance is no excuse -- once you have created a life, you can't take it back, even if blind, crippled, or a canine psychopath!!

COST: Dog breeding is NOT a money-making proposition, if done correctly. Health care and shots, diagnosis of problems and proof of quality, extra food, facilities, stud fees, advertising, etc. are all costly and must be paid BEFORE the pups can be sold. An unexpected Caesarean or emergency intensive care for a sick pup will make a break-even litter become a big liability. And this is IF you can sell the pups.

SALES: First-time breeders have no reputation and no referrals to help them find buyers. Previous promises of "I want a dog just like yours" evaporate. Consider the time and expense of caring for pups that may not sell until four months, eight months or more! What WOULD you do if your pups did not sell? Send them to the pound? Dump them in the country? Sell them cheap to a dog broker who may resell them to labs or other unsavory buyers? Veteran breeders with a good reputation often don't consider a breeding unless they have cash deposits in advance for an average-sized litter.

JOY OF BIRTH: If you're doing it for the children's education, remember the whelping may be at 3 a.m. or at the vet's on the surgery table. Even if the kiddies are present, they may get a chance to see the birth of a monster or a mummy, or watch the bitch scream and bite you as you attempt to deliver a pup that is half out and too large. Some bitches are not natural mothers and either ignore or savage their whelps. Bitches can have severe delivery problems or even die in whelp -- pups can be born dead or with gross deformities that require euthanasia. Of course there can be joy, but if you can't deal with the possibility of tragedy, don't start.

TIME: Veteran breeders of quality dogs state they spend well over 130 hours of labor in raising an average litter. That is over two hours per day, every day! The bitch CANNOT be left alone while whelping and only for short periods for the first few days after. Be prepared for days off work and sleepless nights. Even after delivery, mom needs care and feeding, puppies need daily checking, weighing and socialization. Later, grooming and training, and the whelping box needs lots of cleaning. More hours are spent doing paperwork, pedigrees and interviewing buyers. If you have any abnormal conditions, such as sick puppies or a bitch who can't or won't care for her babes, count on double the time. If you can't provide the time, you will either have dead pups or poor ones that are bad tempered, antisocial, dirty and/or sick -- hardly a buyer's delight.

HUMANE RESPONSIBILITIES: Its midnight -- do you know where your puppies are? There are THREE AND A HALF MILLION unwanted dogs put to death in pounds in this country each year, with millions more dying homeless and unwanted through starvation, disease, automobiles, abuse, etc. Nearly a quarter of the victims of this unspeakable tragedy are purebred dogs "with papers". The breeder who creates a life is responsible for that life. Will you carefully screen potential buyers? Or will you just take the money and not worry if the puppy is chained in a junkyard all of its life or runs in the street to be killed? Will you turn down a sale to irresponsible owners? Or will you say "yes" and not think about the puppy you held and loved now having a litter of mongrels every time she comes in heat, which fills the pounds with more statistics -- your grand-pups? Would you be prepared to take a grown puppy if the owners can no longer care for it? Or can you live with the thought that the baby you helped bring into the world will be destroyed at the pound?

CONCLUSIONS: Because of these facts, we believe that dog breeding is best left to the "professional breeder". What makes a breeder professional?

A professional breeder is one who has made a lifetime commitment to the well-being and IMPROVEMENT of one, or possibly two, breeds.

A professional has studied and researched his breed and knows, intimately, its history and Standard, its strong points and drawbacks.

A professional has spent time, effort and MONEY researching and proving the qualities and health of her potential breeding stock. Those that do not prove out are NOT bred. She plans a litter only with the goal of puppies better than the parents, not for profit or vanity.

A professional considers his dog's health and well-being far more important than their ability to reproduce.

A professional has both the time and mental fortitude to BE THERE for her bitches and puppies. She evaluates her litters and makes every effort to match puppy to buyer in temperament, attitude, and energy level as well as physical qualities.

A professional is, first and foremost, selling to responsible, loving homes. While some exceptional pups may be saved for special show homes, the professional does not force entangling contracts or arrangements for "puppies back" on people who are only interested in a pet.

A professional keeps in periodic contact with the owners of puppies he's sold, not only to see the development of his breeding program, but also because he cares about their well-being.

A professional does NOT have so many dogs that she has no time for individual attention, play and grooming, or so that she has to skimp on food quality, space, preventative medicine, and health care.

A professional assumes responsibility for the life he creates -- carefully screening buyers, helping find new homes, making a comfortable life for his retirees, and, yes, being able to make the decision to euthanize when a puppy born with a mental or physical problem has no chance for a quality life.

A professional builds a good reputation slowly based on dedication and consistent quality, not on volume, advertising, or from a casual or self-glorifying attitude.

A professional goes further and assumes some responsibility for the problems of her breed as a whole -- she belongs to an organization for the breed, she continues to read about new developments, and she works to reduce the number of her breed that are carelessly bred, ill cared-for, and discarded.

A professional can look at a bigger picture than dog show wins or puppy sales and contributes in some way to the betterment of dogs as a whole.

Given a choice, educated owners much prefer to buy from these professionals. If you want to join the professional ranks, we'll enjoy working with you as you learn. If you feel this is more obligation than you care to take on, choose the responsible alternative of having your pet neutered.

Copyright 1989 Bonnie Wilcox, Preemption, Illinois. Reprinted in its entirety, by permission of the author, for reproduction and distribution, free of charge, for educational purposes.