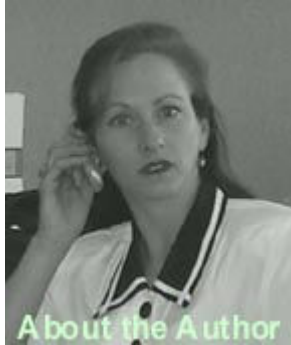


The Backyard Breeder Fallacy

by Ms. Jade, TheDogPress Legislative Reporter



About the Author

I own purebred dogs. Once a year or so I breed a litter from DNA profiled champion stock. For that, I will never apologize as I truly have the best interest of my chosen breed foremost in my mind. Am I an elitist? You betcha! Would I cringe if you went so far as to call me a dog Nazi? No. Serious breeders mate dogs of known background in order to reduce the chances of congenital defects and predict with greater accuracy the positive outcome of a planned litter of puppies. Therefore I probably seem like an unlikely advocate for the guy advertising puppies in the local newspaper. However, I am also a civil libertarian. And I won't apologize for that either.

Proposed, pending and contested legislation around the United States and abroad that is aimed at restricting our property rights by targeting animal reproduction has become rampant at every level of government. Forced spay and neuter, cost prohibitive licenses for unaltered dogs and breeding permits, micro chipping of our animals with their information (and ours) in government data bases, warrant-less inspection of our property, arbitrary limits on the number of animals we can responsibly care for and mandatory husbandry practices are some of the ways in which dog owners are being relieved of their civil rights.

While our agrarian forefathers did not specifically guarantee us the right to own and breed animals, they did guarantee us the right to be treated equally under the law, the right to own property, the right to be free from warrant-less search and seizure of that property, the right to due process and the right to commerce. With no respect for our Constitution, animal rights supporters are working hard to relieve us of these rights by packaging restrictive legislation in a way that is not only palatable to dog owners, even some breeders, but misleadingly leaves them with the impression that they have supported something beneficial. Far too many animal owners and welfare advocates are buying into it in one area or another.

Divide and conquer. By creating stereotypes and labels, like "puppy mill" and "backyard breeder" and attaching a stigma to those labels, the animal rights movement is trying to disgrace the act of breeding animals. And they're doing a great job. The media has been flooded with images of dogs being raised in cages, in filth, in neglect. Sad faces of shelter animals behind prison bars on "death row". Images intended to produce an emotional response instead of an intellectual one. And don't forget the staggering statistics.

It's not a secret that animal rights mean no more domestic animals. It's in their mission statements. HSUS president Wayne Pacelle brags that "We have no ethical obligation to preserve the different breeds of livestock produced through selective breeding. One generation and out. We have no problem with the extinction of domestic animals. They are the creations of human selective breeding". Allow me to translate, no animal breeding means no more animals.

Period. And while the general public cannot be sold on such a radical concept, it's been surprisingly easy to sell them on the concept of ever tightening restrictions. Although united in our love of domestic dogs, slick marketing by the enemy has created infighting. Breeders both private and commercial, rescuers, shelter staff, animal control, dog show exhibitors and pet owners are cleverly being turned against one another to forward the animal rights agenda. Each believing that their point of view is the only valid one and everyone else's civil rights no longer matter.

Yes, I too personally find those images disturbing. They are the product of gross human negligence and irresponsibility. I love animals, I have been a shelter volunteer, and I believe in animal welfare but I am also a realist. Things are rarely what they appear on the surface. In order to end the animal surplus and related suffering, I want to get to the actual cause, to prevent the illness instead of treating the symptoms, so to speak.

The demand for a product (puppies, for example) is driven by the consumer. It's a simple case of supply and demand in a free market economy. Don't blame the seller for being an opportunist. It's only human nature flourishing in what is still a mostly democratic society. An uneducated consumer has every right to purchase an inferior product and suffer the consequences. Just as the seller has every right to promote the benefits their product, in order to influence the decisions of the consumer. If breed purists and elitists like me are outraged at breeders who turn a profit by selling what we consider to be an inferior product, then we must only blame ourselves for failing to educate the buyers.

Ignore the propaganda; dog breeding is not the cause of shelter overpopulation. Animals end up in shelters for a myriad of reasons. Behavior problems that result from a lack of training and proper socialization along with normal breed characteristics that the owner finds unacceptable top the list. Owner death, job transfer/move, landlord/rental restrictions, insurance discrimination, financial trouble and the inability to comply with escalating pet ownership restrictions also contribute to the problem. The system is designed to perpetuate it.

We live in a disposable society. As long as domestic animals are viewed as a short term convenience, instead of a serious long term commitment then change is unlikely. The problem is one of perspective, information and education. Pointing fingers at each other is cowardly and counterproductive.

According to a 2005 article in the HSUS magazine All Animals, 75% of the shelter population is comprised of mongrels. Now I'm no math wizard, but I can extrapolate that only 25% must therefore be purebred animals. If this is true, then random bred dogs are the real cause of shelter overpopulation, not "puppy mills", breed enthusiasts or "backyard breeders" of purebred dogs. Yet this same HSUS article praises the mongrel as superior because of its' larger gene pool. One that may very well be polluted with unknown genetic defects. They even go so far as to market them as a "designer" product. Sort of a haute couture, one of a kind canine fashion accessory.

Now, it occurs to me that if you truly want to reduce the animal shelter population in a meaningful and dramatic way, than you should advocate for the elimination of the mongrel, through mandatory spay and neuter of random bred dogs with unknown ancestry. (See, I am a dog Nazi!) Most dog breeders know that you must have a firm grasp of the genetic past, in order to improve the genetic future of your line. Many of the minority purebred animals that end up in the local shelter may not have a known origin either, and are therefore not an ethical choice for perpetuation of their breed. The same "hybrid vigor" so highly touted in the mongrel is just as

easily achieved by crossing healthy purebreds of known ancestry to create new breeds. Man has done so since the beginning of domesticated dog breeding and whatever we fancy, that breed was created by this process.

The beauty of purebred dogs is that there is something to appeal to almost anyone. I don't have to agree with your choice but I must respect your right to make it. I'm not going to advise that consumers rush out and purchase a Puggle, Labradoodle, or Cockapoo, anymore than I would suggest that everyone should select my preferred breed. (Not everyone deserves one!) Whether these designer hybrids stand the test of time or fade out with other trends is not for me to say. Freedom of choice means the freedom to make the wrong choice, and the freedom to make better choices in the future.

Am I a "backyard breeder"? Well, by technical definition I guess I am. I have also been a front yard breeder, a living room breeder and a cab of my motor home on the way to the dog show breeder. If that makes me a villain, then the animal rights lunatics and the terrorists who support their ideology win. But if you become an independent thinker, then freedom wins. We all win.

Ms. Jade

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