

The Adverse Effects of the Selective Breeding of Dogs

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In the last 350 years, a large number of dogs have been bred for purposes other than increased physical ability. This can be attributed to an increase in “designer dog” popularity - where specific breeds are mixed/bred with a focus on dog aesthetics but a disregard for dog health. As time goes on, the issue of how the dogs are bred becomes rather troublesome, due to a multitude of genetic, economic, and political factors. Many continue to ask the simple question , “What will happen with the breeding of designer dogs in the future?” A few holistic solutions exist that can stop the practice in its tracks, or remove the unethical procedures from it. The most viable solution is to have increased legislation, which will work towards shutting down the breeders with unethical practices, while allowing breeders who maintain a close hold on their work to continue practicing under a watchful eye. This solution works hand in hand with another step of the process; educating the public on the harmful effects of the designer dog industry.

Dog breeding results in genetic changes and mutations, which are often difficult to understand and volatile. In the case of designer dogs, the window for their breeding is slowly closing due to an important part of reproduction - the gene pool -, and in the future, a generational buildup (generations for bred dogs are much shorter, and some females start having puppies at 2 or 3) can cause burdening health issues for some breeds. The Institute of Canine Biology states, “ there is a clear consensus about why dogs have such a burden of genetic disorders. They are the predictable consequence of breeding animals in a closed gene pool using

protocols that result in increased homozygosity, in which an animal gets two copies of the same allele at a locus...the unfortunate downside of this is that mutated genes are just as likely to be homozygous as the good genes that you want to be passed on to the puppies - and a puppy that inherits two copies of a recessive mutation will not have a good, functional copy of the gene that should be at that locus...some of these mutations will break something significant, and a dog that gets two copies of that gene will be affected by a disorder of some sort (Institute of Canine Biology)” Generationally, when more puppies are born, the gene pool gets smaller, and more diseases can affect dogs. In the future, we can expect that this will cause certain breeds to reach irreparable status. Scientists are currently working to create scanning machines and other helpful forms of detection for such diseases, but that technology will not come out by the time that anti-unethical breeding legislation is passed. Further information about the dangers of breeding and the closing gene pool were stated by Carol Beuchat, a Ph.D. underlining the detrimental effects of a closing gene pool. Beuchat says, “ The consequences of inbreeding (in all animals) are insidious but obvious if you look – decreased fertility, difficulty whelping, smaller litters, higher puppy mortality, puppies that don’t thrive, shorter lifespan, etc. Genetically healthy dogs should get pregnant if mated. They should have large litters of robust puppies, with low pup mortality. Animals that cannot produce viable offspring are removed by natural selection.” Beuchat brings up another important point relating to the breeding of designer dogs. She says that not all dogs carry a trait, and often when a certain one is in high demand, lots of inbreeding occurs - this can be as bad as sibling to sibling or child to parent in rare cases. This further reduces the gene pool and is one of the major problems that current legislators are using in attempts to constrict breeding practices.

The selective breeding of designer dogs for special traits/purposes has and continues to be an issue for legislators in proving to not only their peers but to the public that breeding is a significant issue and that it needs to be solved. Currently, there are legislators who are working towards expanding the AWA (Animal Welfare Act), which was passed in early 1996. The state of breeding has changed since then, and even more designer dog breeds have emerged, further stressing the need for urgent legislative action.

In addition to legislation, public education, and a change in practices, the new add-on for the AWA is the Stop Puppy Mills campaign. This is currently passed in thirty-five states and advocates to “stop the sale of puppy mill puppies and improve standards of care for dogs in commercial breeding operations through both national and local policy efforts and by educating consumers on the issue.” There will also be additions to the state funded shelters, which are currently overcrowded and have to deal with euthanization on a daily basis.

Public knowledge and opinion is also very important in determining how the industry will look in the future. Veterinarians and other pet health specialists have recorded journals about what they have observed in relation to breeding for aesthetic values. Dan O'Neill, a vet from England, has emphasized the extreme importance of letting customers and the common public know about the life spans of the dogs that they want so badly. He warns that the public wanting designer dogs will mean the unregistered breeders will continue their work, and even more will open up. Breeding Business states, “people are mating dogs with the intention of producing specific qualities...For backyard breeders, the main goal of breeding their dogs is to make a profit. They will do this by producing “unusual” mixes (mutts), “rare” coat colors, and following the latest trends. Whatever the public finds the cutest at that time, they will probably attempt to breed. Breeders like this contribute to the negative effects of dog breeding!” As time goes on,

more fabricated breeds come about due to the wants of the general population. As understood by most licensed breeders and veterinarians, controlling the spread of this in the future will require further education of the public. As stated by Bridget Baker (A Zoologist from the University of New Hampshire), “The current dog breeding system coerces dog breeders into making decisions that could be detrimental to the dogs of the future” We can infer from this statement and other important statistics provided that the current dog breeding system, which contains three factors: Public needs, irresponsible breeding practices, and a closing gene pool, so without change, the quality of life for many species of dogs will be adversely affected, and there will be irreversible damages.

The dog breeding industry has taken a turn for the worse with the introduction of “designer dogs” in the last few centuries. The industry is controlled by public opinion and what dog is “trendy” as of now. This means that unethical breeding practices are seen that adversely affect dogs and their offspring. A solution that provides help to each sector of the dog breeding issue is improved legislation and an update to public education on dog breeding. Legislation will stop underqualified breeders from practicing, and public education will end the “fad dog” era. A step by step process starting with grassroots social campaigns, and then legislation that reinforces older breeding regulations while also creating new guidelines for sustainable breeding practices will be best to ameliorate the current “designer dog” situation.

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