

THE FUTURE OF DOGS IN AMERICA

What if the animal rights movement wins?

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What does the future hold for U.S. dogs? We'd like to think that pets will be healthier and happier, that more dogs will come from the best breeders and fewer from the others, that laws will punish only the real offenders and at least not discourage good ownership and breeding. Is that where we're going, or is the future darker?

We will try to predict the future, looking twenty years ahead. We will focus on what dog ownership and breeding might be like in 2026 if the AR movement continues to win. This exercise is not fun but it can be useful: if what we see in the future is bad enough, maybe we can do more to change the things that are happening today.

Any such prediction depends on identifying the current trends that may be expected to shape the future. Of course trends change and the unexpected changes in current trends are where a prediction twenty years out is most likely to go wrong.

This prediction assumes that current trends will continue. If you assume that trends get worse -- for example, that money is found for muscular enforcement of bad laws -- you would get a worse picture, while if someone very wealthy decided to help defend our rights to keep and breed pets, if owners and breeders became concerned about loss of rights at a rapidly increasing rate, or if the AKC suddenly got new and wise leadership, things could be much better.

Trying to predict the future is the key to taking control of that future. I hope this will be taken in that spirit.

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS TODAY?

In 2006 there are a few good things happening. More animal lovers are learning that there is a serious problem and starting to work against it. We are winning a greater fraction of the lawmaking battles than was true even five years ago and a few lawmakers seem to be starting to 'get it' about animal rights. The Center for Consumer Freedom provides very useful anti-AR public education, The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC), and the NRA make small but significant contributions. Several other organizations -- The Sportsmen and Animal Owners Voting Alliance (SAOVA), the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), and the Cat Fanciers Association (CFA) also play roles. The new company 'My Dog Votes' could be a big help in spreading the word. There are more and better blogs on our side. There are a number of lawsuits trying to overturn some of the worst laws and some of these may succeed. Laws against animal-related terrorism are improving and we can expect strong enforcement.

The first PAWS bill (S. 1139 and H.R. 2669, which would have extended federal Animal Welfare Act rules to the retail-only breeders who are currently exempt), seems to be dead. Senator Rick Santorum, the sponsor of 'PAWS' was defeated in the 2006 elections and we can certainly target the sponsor of any repeat bill.

However, there are also some very BAD things going on. By far the most important trend today is the increasing power of the animal rights movement. As of 2006 there's no question that the AR movement is winning, steadily taking away our rights to own and breed pet animals.

The most obvious of the AR trends is the number of cities and counties that are passing anti-pet laws. Southern California is passing mandatory spay/neuter (MSN) laws with complicated and expensive breeder licensing provisions in one county after another. Albuquerque's 'HEART' ordinance is even worse -- it includes not just MSN and breeder licenses but also close regulation of dog ownership and all forms of pet animal business. In some of these areas there have been efforts to fight back to undo the bad laws but none have been successful yet. I believe California will pass MSN with some form of breeder licensing at the state level within five years.

Rhode Island has passed guardianship for all pets and MSN with no exceptions for cats, meaning that the lawful breeding of cats is over, there. I'd expect severe restrictions on dog breeding within a few years. Pennsylvania's Governor Rendell is in the pocket of hard core AR interests and is pushing rules and enforcement changes there that would eliminate home breeding within a few years.

It's nearly certain that a new PAWS bill will be tried again next year. With Congress having been taken over by Democrats we will lose some valuable allies in stopping the new bill.

The AKC is no more clued in to the threat to purebred dogs (and the AKC's existence) than they were five years ago. Chances of the needed 'extreme makeover' in AKC leadership seem to be small to none. Most of the current AR mischief comes from just a few very-well funded organizations -- HSUS, PETA, and others that are less well known -- but the 'Best Friends Animal Shelter' is now turning to promoting anti-dangerous dog laws that could eliminate some breeds and we can expect growing trouble on that front.

The combination of ignorance, under funding, laziness, and animal rights orientation on the part of animal control and other public officials is putting three and four pet limits into even tiny and far out rural places one after another. Because good breeding is a multi-year project (you must keep animals from each generation for possible future breeding) you cannot have a quality breeding program within a four pet limit. When a kennel license allowing more is available, it generally comes with 'any reasonable time' inspections of your home.

For most people, if a hobby of perhaps twenty years can be inspected by a high school graduate with no felony convictions, a clipboard, a day or less of training in animal husbandry and perhaps an AR chip on his shoulder, it isn't a hobby anymore. Other requirements -- one current proposal would require a written record every time every animal is fed -- will complete the conversion of a hobby (something you do for satisfaction and fun) to a money-losing business. How many of us will continue?

Except for the large animal vets, most veterinarians and most vet organizations remain clueless about animal rights. In my state, the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association's position on our state's worst bill last year (requiring rabies vaccinations to be reported for dog licensing purposes) was "We can't oppose a law that just enforces another law." That bill passed by a hair. At the national level, the AVMA stopped short of a decision to form an alliance with HSUS but continues to support the first steps toward national mandatory microchipping of all pets.

As I write this, the 'Coalition To Reunite Pets and Families' made up of HSUS, the National Animal Control Association, and several other organizations that would like to see close regulation of pets or expect to profit from mandatory microchipping are pushing hard for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to make a rule requiring Animal Welfare Act dealers (commercial breeders) to use European microchips instead of U.S. ones. The USDA too would like such a rule. The story is too long to tell here but this rule will put us firmly on the road to a law requiring all pets to be microchipped and registered in a government data base. A federal bill for that purpose might be introduced around 2009.

The court interpretation of laws is likely to turn more strongly against us. The ARs OWN about three dozen law schools and Bob Barker is buying them a new one every six months or a year. Five years from today, many new lawyers will have specialized in animal law and almost 100% of them will be AR oriented. By 2026 many of those lawyers will be judges and some will be lawmakers.

The media prints anti-AR letters to the editor, just as they do stories of alien abductions and that CIA conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. Mainstream magazines such as Time and Dog Fancy are AR-leaning and articles on AR-related topics in other publications take the AR side: Other than an article in The Atlantic Monthly in the 1990's I cannot think of an exception.

There are three books exposing the AR movement but all are seriously out of date; we are promised a revised edition of one of them for 2007.

With so few (and small) useful organizations on our side, much of the anti-AR work is being done with irregular forces -- email lists and other loose organizations -- and the less-than-a-handful of state federations of clubs and individual larger clubs that really do 'get it.' Significant awareness of the AR agenda among the general public is still well in the future. Both creating awareness and the rest of what must be done to keep home breeding legal and pet ownership free of impossible restrictions are very slow going with irregular forces.

Where will these trends take us in twenty years? Let's...

FAST FORWARD OUR TIME MACHINE TO 2026

Much of what follows may seem impossible if you're not in the middle of the fight. However all of the laws needed to create the situation I'm about to describe have been seriously proposed and most of them are in effect in some places. The rest is just predicting how people will react as these laws spread to cover our whole country.

The good news is that there are still pets in 2026. Not quite as many as twenty years ago, but most families that want a pet dog or cat do have one. However...

Only about one dog in three is legal. Legal dogs come from large scale commercial breeders and importers plus a handful of wealthy individuals who still breed dogs as a hobby. Because of the many requirements the law makes of breeders, legal dogs are too costly for most people to own: upward from \$5000 for a pet shop dog. A home bred purebred starts at \$15,000; maybe a bit less for an imported animal. (All prices guessed in 2006 dollars.)

You can get a legal dog at the animal shelter for about \$2000; most of them are dogs that have been seized from illegal breeders or because they were illegally owned. Larger shelters either import in quality or -- since shelters are exempt from the anti-breeding laws -- operate their own breeding programs.

Except for the few belonging to commercial breeders and wealthy individuals with very expensive licenses, legal dogs are all sterilized. All are microchipped and tracked by the government from birth to a required vet-signed death certificate. The enforcement risks (what if your dog escapes, your neighbor reports you for poor care, or your vet turns you in for missing a required every-two-years routine checkup) add to the fear factor and the cost of owning a legal dog.

This is of course the future that the animal rights movement wanted for ALL dogs, on the way to completely eliminating pets. However, because Americans really do love dogs, the AR movement hasn't been able to get strong enough enforcement of the laws creating this grim 'legal' pet status to make it even close to 100%. Two out of every three dogs now, are illegal.

ILLEGAL dogs come from a vast cottage industry of back in the woods or over there under the workbench in the garage mostly very-small-scale illegal breeders. Who is this 'puppy moonshine' maker? Your neighbor, your aunt, or the guy who takes care of your car, possibly all three.

Because demand for pets has remained high but most people can't afford a legal dog, demand for illegal puppies is high and they too are expensive -- a minimum of \$1000 for a just-weaned pup with no shots, do your own worming. At these prices, people can make good money breeding just one litter a year, and they do, even though they don't have the required licenses, comply with the kennel requirements, microchip their puppies, report names of new owners, or any of the rest. They are thus completely outside the law, subject to severe penalties if they get caught. The good news is that these folks are willing to take the risk in exchange for the added income, so middle class folks can still have dogs; the bad news is that most of them don't know much about dogs or dog breeding.

In theory, enforcement could be tightened to almost completely choke off the illegal dogs but efforts by HSUS and friends to get even stronger laws and more money for enforcement seem to have stalled. We pay billions in tax dollars a year for a war on drugs that is only somewhat effective but there is NO chance that we'll vote to spend that kind of money to stop illegal breeding, especially since most of us are getting our dogs from outside the legal pet system.

In fact even most animal shelters don't want illegal breeding stopped. As was true in Los Angeles as early as 2005, unlicensed breeding has become a profitable cash crop for shelters nationwide. Every breeder bust yields perhaps \$10,000 in shelter income for just a few hours work. Shelters seize and sell the dogs and they fine the breeder -- but not too big a fine or too many of the illegal breeders, because that would kill the 'crop.' No trial is ever necessary because illegal breeders are happy to plead guilty to a neglect charge carrying a \$1000 fine and sign over their animals, rather than face required jail time for an illegal breeding conviction.

Illegal dogs are nearly all mixed breeds, although some do look like specific breeds and a few of the underground breeders claim that they use only purebred breeding animals. But no illegal dog comes with registration papers since registration requires enrollment in the government data base.

It is still technically legal to breed dogs in most states but only people wealthy enough to be able to live in a properly zoned area, build a suitable kennel, and employ a kennelmaster to handle the licenses, paperwork, record keeping, and inspections do it as a hobby and only by importing nearly all their breeding animals. Naturally their puppies sell mostly to other wealthy folks.

With the end of lawful (practical middle class) home breeding, came the end of most breeds of purebred dog in America. You cannot reduce the numbers in a breed below a certain level before the genetic diversity needed for litters to thrive is lost, and in most breeds, most of the gene pool was in the hands of home breeders. Still more breeds were lost because the increase of inherited problems made many breeders give it up, even in the last places that allowed unlicensed breeding.

There was talk of breeding purebreds in secret but the networks needed to preserve a breed when few people own more than two dogs are extremely risky. Think of co-owning twenty dogs with nine other breeders. Okay, now think of that group working together to commit a serious crime...

The majority of Americans see good quality purebreds mainly on TV.

Because of pet guardianship and very high values set by courts for the value of a pet's life, vet care is now several times as expensive as it was twenty years ago. When people cut back on care after the Pet Guardianship Act of 2012, HSUS promoted and passed the Healthy Pets Act of 2018 which required all owners to get certain basic care and required vets to report care to the government. Failure to get the required care for your dog can mean fines of \$1000 or more.

Because vets are required to report illegal dogs, these animals get almost no care, although 'see no evil' vets are out there if you can afford them. There are only half as many vets as there were twenty years ago but they are making wonderful money.

The nastiest anti-pet laws of 2006 -- breed specific laws requiring owners to line up and turn in pets for euthanasia, abusive seizures that ruined people's lives, and the occasional felony cruelty conviction for a clean-kill of a nuisance dog -- zapped perhaps a thousand people a year. I'm not aware that there was ever any violence by these victims. If told to give up Fido for that last needle, people cried and did it and when Cleo Club-President was busted on a fake charge by an ACO who hated her guts, and got suspended and fined, had her judge's license canceled by the AKC and was then thrown out of her club, she plopped herself down on the couch and cried until she had gained 50 pounds. In 2006, pet owners crushed by animal control all turned their pain and anger inward.

Not any more. Enforcement of the much stronger laws of 2026 -- nearly 40 breeds are banned now and seizure-enforced pet limits are universal -- has hurt tens of thousands of people per year for over a decade. The predictable result has been that enforcement nails some owners who don't take it well, and there has been occasional violence. One day just before Christmas in 2015 a shelter worker took the leash from the hand of a crying young woman, turned to take her dog back to the euthanasia area, and got a 12" butcher knife in his back. Evidently the woman then took the leash away from him and walked out. None of the other four owners waiting in line was able to describe the killer and she was never found.

In some parts of the country there are links between illegal breeding and organized crime. Just as happens with illegal drugs there has been some violence associated with control of sales territories. Payoffs to law enforcement are common in many areas, often in the form of free puppies for an officer's family.

A few shelters have been burned, animal control vehicles have been attacked, and there have been dozens of 'liberations' of seized dogs. A/C and shelters have beefed up security but there have been too many victims and there are too many targets; low-level violence of this kind seems to be permanent. Of course (just as in 2006) most A/C workers are decent people, guilty of no more than doing what the law requires. Most of these stories are not just ugly but tragic.

For a time, snitches played a substantial part in enforcing the laws but that largely ended after a few hundred of cases of serious property damage (mostly burning of garages and automobiles) and a couple of dozen killings. Even vets weren't exempt: Here's a joke that went the rounds on the 'Net in 2023:

"Know how to make your vet miserable?"

"No, how?"

"Take your dog to him for his shots."

(In the context of most dogs being illegal, you would be forcing the vet to choose between ignoring the law requiring reporting of illegal dogs, thus risking a \$10,000 fine, and the possibility of violence if he complies with the law.)

Very few of those cases have been solved. As with drug-related crime in urban areas, the list of suspects was often most of the people in the immediate area and there were almost never any witnesses. After a time the police (who had their own illegal dogs, after all) simply gave up.

'Let sleeping dogs lie' (with a wink) became the motto.

The welfare of dogs is considerably worse than it was in 2006. While true overpopulation is completely gone (nobody ever turns in a puppy to a shelter) the poor breeding and socialization practices that are normal among illegal breeders mean that many puppy homes don't succeed. The number of stray dogs has increased dramatically and nobody knows the extent of 'shoot, shovel, and shut up' occurring in rural areas. There's a steady increase in the fraction of shelter intake dogs that must be euthanized as unfit pets and this adds to the incentive for shelters to seize, import, and breed dogs. With the loss of middle class home breeders there are no longer any breeders helping buyers with problems or taking their puppies back.

Pet health too has gone downhill, due to the extreme inbreeding common among unskilled 'moonshine' breeders and the lack of vet care for the many illegal dogs. Because of the very high costs, even legal dogs often get only the legally required minimum care.

Since its financial failure in 2012, the AKC has been effectively owned by HSUS. It is less than half the size of 2006, even though litter registrations now cost \$950 and individual dogs, \$195 and the major focus is on activities for (legal only) mixed breed dogs. There are only a couple of dozen purebred dog shows per year, nationwide, and entries are still declining as the cost of purebred dogs continues to go up.

HSUS isn't doing very well either. It has used up all the easy 'for the animals' campaigns and the realization is growing that they are NOT helping animals, but are actually part of the problem. HSUS's business model amounts to strip-mining the good will built up by the organization back when it was an animal welfare organization. It is a business built on quicksand and it is starting to sink. Annual revenues are down by half from the peak year of 2015. However, lies and a devoted base of hard core AR supporters allow them to keep them spewing their garbage and buying up lawmakers year by year.

It appears that things are starting to turn around. The gradual weakening of HSUS, public attention coming from the violence, the dawning recognition that it isn't just that you can't buy the purebred dog you remember from when you were a child but that there are almost no purebreds at all, the views of a growing number of experts that, far from protecting animals, the tangle of laws has reduced their numbers AND made them (and humans) less happy and less healthy -- all this has begun to bend the road back in favor of animal owners.

However, the turning is very slow. Many anti-animal laws were passed not just for animal rights reasons but also because they made things easier for animal control organizations. A pet limit law, for example, can be used as a one-size-fits-all answer to nearly any animal complaint, either by telling the individual whose dogs are a noise nuisance "You are over the limit -- reduce your numbers" or by telling the complainant "Sorry -- he's within the limit so there's nothing we can do" instead of enforcing the noise ordinance.

Bad laws give A/C more power. No enforcement agency willingly gives that up. There is some talk of a federal law preempting some of the anti-pet and anti-breeding state and local laws but it hasn't happened yet. There's also wide recognition of the general corruption and abuse 'under color of law' by animal control organizations but the corruption comes from the grants of large amounts of power by the many laws; unless those laws are repealed there seems no solution.

In-the-open home breeding has become so unfamiliar that it has the 'not in my backyard' problem. When liberalization is discussed the responses are usually "We don't allow ANY kind of farming here -- someone

who wants to breed dogs, should buy a farm and move to the country." and "If we made breeding legal here, our town would be full of breeders: we don't want all that noise and smell."

Pet owners still have no effective national voice and that makes it much harder to pass our own laws.

Mandatory microchipping of all pets has made billions of dollars for makers of chips, vet clinics, and chip registries and it continues to be a fountain of gold for them. Because it facilitates enforcement of all the other pet laws, the AR movement is determined to keep it. However, making government control that easy guarantees that there will be government control. The battle to undo the mandatory microchipping laws may seesaw for a decade or more but until they are undone, ownership and breeding of dogs cannot truly return to being a hobby.

In 2026 the situation of pet dogs in the U.S. has hit bottom and will gradually begin to improve. However undoing the damage of the last 25 years -- untangling the maze of laws, each with its own devoted supporters, rebuilding the breeds, breeding knowledge and skills, kennel and breed clubs, beginning over again to spread the basics of good dog ownership to the average family -- may take a century.