

Dog and Cat Epidemic in Valencia County

Judy Babcock, Quixote Humane, Inc.

Last year 5039 dogs and cats died in the Valencia County shelter by euthanasia, brought on by the social disease - apathy. That translates to nearly one animal for every four and a half homes in our county. Most of these animals were not sick, aggressive, or elderly; they simply had the misfortune of being born in an area that has an over-population of pets.

Because of the massive number of puppies and kittens being produced in the County there is tremendous competition for suitable homes. Unplanned litters are given away to family, friends, or neighbors who take in a cute puppy or kitten without thinking of their long term needs. The remaining unwanted pups and kittens are peddled in the parking lots of high traffic business, are dropped off at the shelter, left to fend for themselves in the neighborhood until they “disappear”, or are dumped in isolated areas and left to die.

Give-away puppies and kittens tend to propagate the cycle. Lack of planning and finances allow a vast number of young animals to come into reproductive age and multiply the problem. Season after season more animals are added to the already over stressed system of homing young animals. Because they are so cute it is hard to resist a puppy or kitten in need. Unfortunately, unprepared families learn that they have made a rash decision and find themselves with more than they bargained for in a new pet. And the cycle is repeated.

Lack of supervision and poor fencing of unsterilized pets, coupled with intentional back-yard breeding and generalized apathy for the condition of animal care in our county keeps generating thousands of excess animals each year. The planned growth of our community will increase the problem exponentially.

Placing animals in homes who cannot afford or do not know how to properly care for their pets results in the thousands of adult animals taken in at our shelter. Only 10% of the animals impounded at the Valencia County shelter are adopted. Most of them die there.

As with most diseases, prevention is the key to reducing these needless deaths. Fighting the euthanasia epidemic requires action by those who are causing the problem - irresponsible owners and breeders. Encouraging the spaying or neutering family pets will make a huge impact on the numbers of unplanned litters. Education of owners who intentionally breed because they “want to: experience the miracle of birth; have one of their beloved pets offspring; or make some money to subsidize their income” will be harder, but just as important.

Education is not a simple thing. Information is readily available for anyone who is interested in learning. Reaching those who need it the most is much more difficult. Just offering it is hit and miss, at best. A combination of information that benefits the community, and a financial incentive to attain it, is the reason why ordinances are formed.

Among other things, the current Valencia County ordinances require that owners keep their pets confined on their property, license their pets, pay a litter fee when selling puppies or kittens, or pay a breeders fee if they intentionally breed. All of these are designed to reduce the number of unplanned dogs and cats that overwhelm our shelter and costing our community hundreds of thousands of dollars for their care and disposal.

We pay the costs, they pay with their lives.

Responsible Breeders A big part of the solution:

Our tremendous pet overpopulation, proven by the number of healthy animals euthanized at the Valencia county shelter every year, shows that breeding the average household pet must be discouraged.

A responsible breeder selects healthy and sound animals that conform to the recognized breed characteristics in order to improve the next generation. They provide veterinary records of the parents and the puppy or kitten. They screen potential buyers to place their animals in homes appropriate to their breed and the temperament of the animal being sold.

A responsible breeder allows the litter to stay with the mother for eight to ten weeks to give them the benefits of the mother's immunity to disease, supply proper nutrition and gain learning experiences from the mother and litter mates that will make them more social.

A responsible breeder provides a clean and safe environment for the mother and her offspring, feeds a high quality food and works with the young to socialize them to the everyday sights, sounds, and activities they will encounter in their new homes so they can fit into their new homes without undo stress.

A responsible breeder will be willing to help the new owner to resolve training issues, answer questions about health concerns and guarantee support for the entire life of the animals they produce.

A responsible breeder requires the buyer to provide regular veterinary visits, the sterilization of pet quality offspring and the return of any unwanted animals.

A responsible breeder does not expect, nor does he get, just a profit from breeding. They love their breed and hope that you will, too.

A responsible breeder does not add to the burden of the shelter and rescue the abused and homeless of their breed.

The animals pictured below are only available for three days, but there are plenty of other choices! Visit the Valencia County Shelter, 1209 NM 314, one mile south of Main Street in Los Lunas. Open 8:00 am - 4:00 pm Tues - Sat. 866-2479