

# What is a breeder?

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We in the dog "fanatic" world of dog shows and dog clubs think a breeder is the hobbyist that we are or that we know. This person carefully plans litters between carefully selected dogs that are of proven quality as demonstrated by dog show or performance event competition. Often, this breeder only breeds one litter every two or three years.....and might be known to criticize their dog show friends that breed more than one litter a year as being "in it for money" or a "puppy mill".

Real world dog breeders? Let me give you four examples that I have known as a veterinarian.

1) This gentleman is a professor at a university. He owns a female boxer of no particular quality or pedigree that he breeds once a year. "It is an easy \$2000-3000!", he says with a grin.

2) This lady has two springer spaniels. The female, about 5 or 6 years old has obviously had litters. "How many litters has she had?", I ask. "I don't know, ten or twelve, she gets bred every time she has come into heat.", she says.

3) I meet this guy at rural, discount vet clinic that I was doing a day of relief work at. This guy has 50 schnauzers. He had a bad week last week, two of his dogs had to have c-sections. Like many local breeders, he loves this discount clinic, the middle of the night c-sections cost him only \$200. (Don't ask the corners that have to be cut to do c-sections for \$200!) He has a bachelor's degree in biology. He has bred and even shown Rottweilers as well, but is getting out of them because the Rottweiler fad is passing. He is not keen on showing anymore, doesn't like the politics. He considers himself a professional dog breeder, is proud of it, and makes a decent living with these fifty dogs. He is aware of the market, and quite expert in canine reproduction. He is happy to be on the forefront of what he thinks are two trends in his breed, "toy" miniature schnauzers and white miniature schnauzers, in addition to his usual salt/pepper and blacks. He sells them through newspapers, flea markets, and the Internet.

4) This farmer discovered that puppies were more profitable than hogs when his wife had a litter from their pet in the kitchen. They now have 30 breeds, all small breeds (more economical to raise). They keep them in pairs on fenced quarter acre lots with a dog house/whelping box in each lot. They vaccinate and deworm all pups before sale, and believe they sell healthy pets. They wholesale their products to pet stores and make \$150 to \$300 per pup, about ten times the revenue that weanling hogs produced. Their son became a veterinarian (not me).

The reality of the purebred dog industry is quite different than dog "fanatics" think it is. The above examples of how dogs are actually produced is much closer to typical than dog club members and quality breeders tend to realize. These four examples of breeders represent the kind of breeders that produce far more dogs than show and performance breeders! Don't believe it? Add up the number of ATCA breeders, estimate the number of pups each produces in a year, total it. Compare that number to the litter and puppy registration numbers that the AKC publishes. Even in an uncommon breed like Airedales, we "quality, hobby breeders", produce the minority of the dogs. However, we produce the future of the breed.

The relationship between the general public and puppy mills is interesting and I get the opportunity to observe it frequently as a vet. The majority of the puppies I see (like most vets) are produced by backyard breeders and puppy mills. This has been true regardless of where I practiced geographically. The public seems to know that puppy mills are the wrong place to get dogs, but they get them there anyway. Dogs frequently are spontaneous purchases and even when they are not, few are patient enough to wait for months on a buyers list for a quality puppy. The public generally does not seem to distinguish between AKC papers and pedigrees and "papers" from other registries. With the AKC crackdowns on puppy mills, a number of alternate registries have formed that seem to be willing to "register" anything. At this point, over half the pups I see are "registered" with non-AKC organizations. The public does not seem to care. Often the cost of puppy mill pups is the same or more than the cost of well bred dogs. This is particularly true of those sold through pet shops. The public is often fooled by claims of "rare" traits. I had a client that had paid over a thousand dollars for a "rare" tri-colored Dachshund from a pet store. On examination, the dog was clearly a mix of Dachshund and Beagle. Variations of this theme are common in many "breeds".

The current fad of “mixed breeds”, (like Labradoodles, puggles, schnockers, yorkidors, chiweenies, etc), has become a successful marketing scheme based on the “fool is born every day” principle with the mixed pups selling for far more than purebreds.

Another interesting point is that most of the pups I see, regardless of source (puppy mill or otherwise) are free from contagious and congenital diseases. The puppy mill dogs are recognizable as their breeds usually, but they generally lack conformational quality and sometimes temperamental quality. The public is unaware on this point. The analogy that I use is wine. The difference between Mogan David and an expensive bottle of wine is lost to me, I don't drink wine. However, I am a connoisseur of dogs, and subtle differences in quality stand out to me. The public is often satisfied with Mogan David wine and puppy mill dogs.

Quality breeders seek puppy buyers that can distinguish the differences.