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A REPORT ON ANIMAL "OVERPOPULATION"

The Humane Society of the United States
1145 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036
September, 1970

H S U S

Breeding Surplus Dogs and Cats Causes Suffering

Not so long ago a two year old baby was killed in St. Louis County, Mo., by a pack of stray, starving dogs. Some of you may have read about it. All of us, from time to time, read of abandoned, hunger-crazed dogs attacking livestock and other animals.

These tragedies stir public anger. They often provoke retaliation in which scores of innocent dogs are killed. They create, for many people, a hatred of dogs.

And, yet, the dogs are not usually to blame. The hunger-driven, half-crazed dog pack is simply a by-product of the greatest cruelty facing the humane movement: *the overbreeding of dogs and cats.*

No cruelty is more widespread than this overbreeding. No cruelty is so insidious. No cruelty is so hard to fight.

Overbreeding has created a surplus of nearly 50 million dogs and cats. These animals are unwanted and homeless. Some of them—the 'lucky' ones—will get a quick, merciful death at humane society shelters. Most, however, haven't even the hope of being reached and protected from suffering in the 3,000 or more communities without humane societies. Instead, they roam the country—starving, thirsting, suf-

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These three appealing kittens are a product of surplus breeding. A humane society found them, tied up in the box shown, in an alley ash can.



Overbreeding cheapens animal life, creates ready supply of animals for research facilities. Many thousands of dogs like these pass through hands of dealers who profit from their surplus. Most were family pets at one time.

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fering from disease and injury.

This is suffering on a massive scale. Many factors contribute to it. Commercial interests like pet shops, for example, are partly to blame in suggesting there is money in breeding puppies and kittens. Veterinarians who charge high fees for spaying female animals and altering males are partly at fault.

But most of the blame lies with misguided animal lovers and humane societies that adopt out unneutered dogs and cats.

Often, pet owners think they are doing a kindness by letting their animals breed. The stark reality is, however, any pet owner who breeds animals he does not intend to keep permanently himself contributes to cruelty and suffering. And we must also recognize and convince others that while there are more dogs and cats than there

are homes available for them, *any* litter of puppies or kittens is surplus.

Animal owners who permit surplus breeding are also the cause of the distasteful killing of animals by humane societies and public pounds. They—not the humane societies or pounds—pass the death sentence by allowing the breeding. The humane societies and public pounds merely administer the sorrowful task. It is ironic most of our kindness is *killing*; it is sad the killing is needed and must continue as long as people breed surplus animals.

Surplus animal breeding causes most of the evils facing local humane societies. It is at the root of animal control problems plaguing communities. It creates problems of overcrowding, disposition, and abandonment.

The abandoned animal suffers the worst of all. Here, in part, is

what one HSUS member had to say to a Pennsylvania paper on this subject:

"I want to tell you what happened to your cat after you dropped her off (abandoned her)," Mrs. Thomas Stoner of Waynesboro, Pa., wrote. "The first few days she stayed just about where you dropped her waiting for you to come back. Then hunger drove her on along the road, searching for food and shelter. By now she eats anything she can find, and it is a rotten, wormy, disease-laden diet. Dogs and other animals chase her. She is almost hit by passing cars. Exposure to freezing nights almost kills her, but your cat is tough . . .

". . . I found your cat today. She was beside my mailbox, right where you wanted her to go to that farmhouse in the country. Only trouble was your cat couldn't see me because her eyes were pasted shut

with infection, every bone showed through her dirty hide, and she couldn't eat because her stomach was already full, distended with worms and by starvation. Too weak to stand, she made a little noise at me—but it was for you, her rightful owner, to hear. She is dead now, but can you still believe that you took care of her the humane way?"

Guilty of contributing to this terrible problem are humane societies and pounds which allow animals out for adoption that have not been spayed or altered. These organizations add to the surplus and to their own problems. Some of them are actually *afraid* to mention spaying or neutering; they think it would reduce the number of animals placed and, thus, reduce the income from such placements.

Your Society carries on a constant nationwide program to solve the problem in its many aspects.

We are trying to make Americans aware of this senseless cruelty. We have published articles in hundreds of newspapers, magazines, and other publications. We have distributed millions of leaflets like "10,000 per Hour" and "From Cause to Effect." Columnists and radio commentators have spread our message. It has been "plugged" on national and local television programs.

These efforts and establishment of spaying clinics have had some effect, of course. There is a growing awareness of the problem. Spaying and neutering clinics have been set up by humane societies in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, Massachusetts, and other states. Others are planned in California and Nevada. As part of its overall program, the National Humane Education Center sponsors a spaying and neutering clinic for pet owners in the Virginia, Mary-

land, and District of Columbia areas.

Even the nation's veterinarians are becoming more conscious of their obligation in this area. A recent editorial in the influential "Modern Veterinary Practice" magazine implies that veterinarians have as much an obligation to the "less affluent segment of the population" as to those who can afford "upper-echelon care."

The professional magazine says veterinarians should turn more of their attention to the methods for handling unwanted animals. It states, "In almost every town and city better rapport with humane groups and animal control agencies would help disadvantaged kids obtain pets—properly vaccinated and spayed—at prices they could afford."

The emphasis here, of course, is on the vaccinating and spaying of

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"Out of sight, out of mind" must be the attitude of owners who turn pets into pounds like this. The bad housing and inhumane conditions cause suffering. How can an owner surrender an animal to such a place and go home and allow more surplus breeding?



Signs of the pet population explosion are everywhere. These puppies have found protection in a humane society shelter. The percentage of homeless animals so lucky is small.

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This little fellow is looking for a home. But, of course, there aren't enough homes to go around. Ignorant and thoughtless owners who allow promiscuous breeding give pets like this a poor chance of life.

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pets. It is clear the veterinary profession is aware of the surplus breeding problem.

Much more needs to be done. Even with a continuing HSUS national program, the scattered sporadic efforts at the local level are not enough to cope with the problem. It will take a total, nationwide effort if we are to prevent countless millions of puppies and kittens being born every year to be killed, abandoned, or otherwise cruelly mistreated.

Education is the first need. We know the facts and we publish them. To be really effective, however, distribution must grow. This means educational publicity in local newspapers, school papers, club bulletins, on radio and television, and before every possible civic organization through well informed speakers.

Persuasion of pet owners is also important. If we can get their cooperation, a community spaying program can easily be organized. It may, indeed, be possible to set up a low cost spaying and neutering clinic.

Then, too, there is need to cooperate with local veterinarians, city and county pounds, cat and kennel clubs, wildlife conservation groups, Boy and Girl Scout organizations and the like.

And, of course, legislation is needed. We must have laws to discourage breeding and to encourage spaying. We must have laws to protect animals by putting penalties on their owners instead of automatic death sentences on the animals. Your Society has detailed information on how you can take part in this great effort. Send for it today. There is no better way in which you can help stop massive animal suffering.