

Part II

A Gathering Storm Bring New Measures

By

Dr. Carmen Battaglia

This is a continuation of last month's discussion of the gathering storm and how it has already begun to impact the world of purebred dogs. The winds that are fueling this storm were identified as the undefined labels that are used by the animal rights movement. As stated in Part I, their efforts have gained wide-spread acceptance among the breeders which in turn have impacted AKC registrations and the gene pools of thirty-five breeds some of which may soon be facing extinction. Related to all of this is the fact that hardly anyone is noticing how effective and dangerous this storm has become. As discussed in Part I, there are many examples that show how, through the use of undefined labels, the animal rights movement has negatively impacted breeding and registrations.

Sociologists who study social change and the use of labels to impact events call this discipline the "labeling process". When epidemiologists study their causes they look for three common denominators. First, whether the labels are defined. Secondly, their underlying purpose or intended target. Thirdly, the strategy that has been linked to the label which later can be grown into something large with varying consequences.

In the dog world the use of undefined labels (responsible breeder, dangerous dogs, viscous dog, puppy mill etc.)has already been demonstrated to be an effective way to negatively impact breeding, ownership and the sport (see Part I). Many believe that the animal rights movement has been successful only because most breeders are so busy with their jobs, families and other things that they fail to notice the implications hidden within the labels they accept and use. What lingers in the background are their intentions and a general lack of awareness. This problem is not limited to just undefined labels; it extends into many other areas. For example, it was not so long ago that three important announcements were widely published in the dog world. The first occurred in 2003, when the AKC reported the introduction of a new Superplex G panel of 13 DNA markers that were designed to improve the quality of parentage testing. This announcement changed the AKC compliance audit program as well as the voluntary testing of puppies and adults. At the same time, the AKC announced that a fourteenth marker had been added to identify the gender of each individual tested. The third announcement came when the AKC Canine Health Foundation (CHF) reported that 25 DNA health tests were available for the screening of breeding stock. Today, no one would question the importance of these announcements even though most breeders are still unaware of their existence.

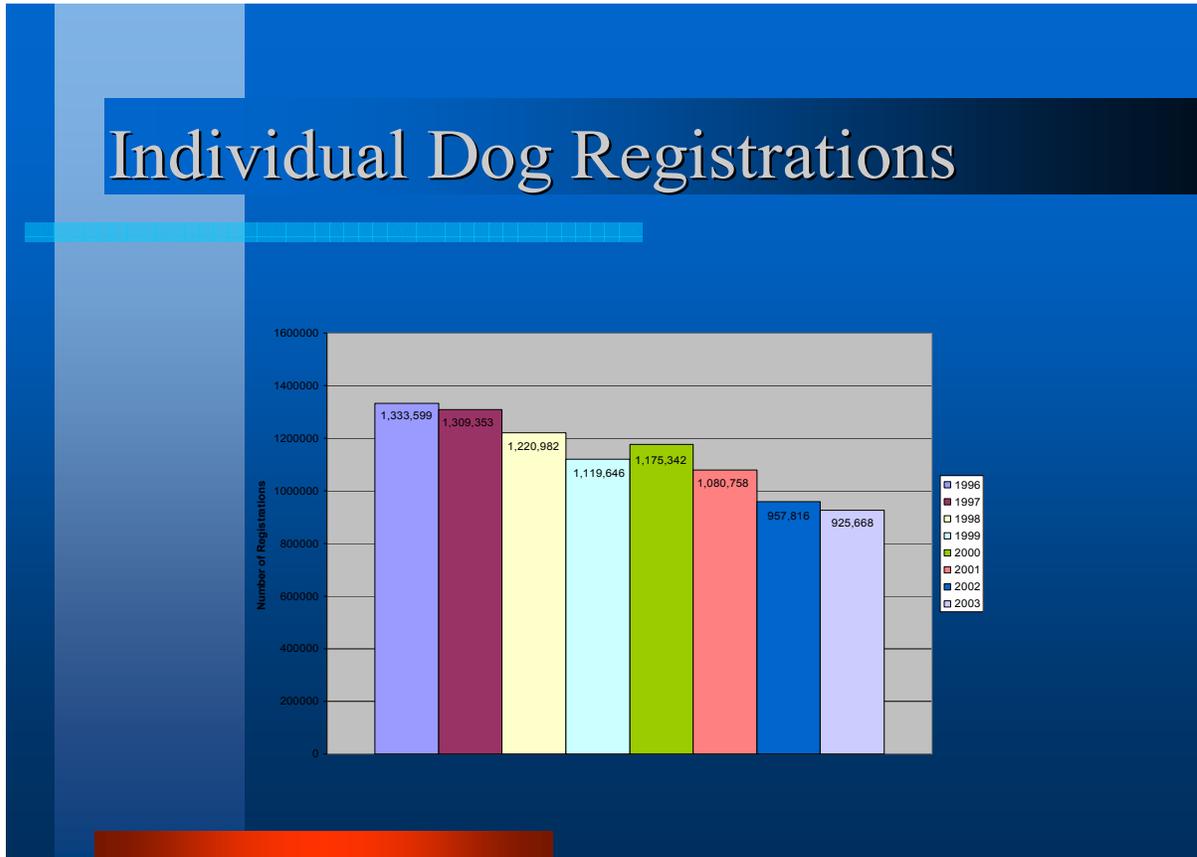
Scenarios like these have led the animal rights activists to believe that the dog world is asleep at the wheel. They believe we are uninformed and therefore vulnerable. This of course works to their advantage. Consider how they effectively were able to link their ideas to the undefined labels called: "puppy mill", "vicious dogs", "dangerous dogs", "over-population" and "responsible dog owners". Each

label played an important role in reducing registrations, zoning, breeding rights, ownership and the number of breeders. Now after more than ten years these same labels continue to impact the sport even though they are all still undefined. This has only encouraged the animal rights groups to move forward with their expectations for the label called "the responsible breeder". It is even more dangerous than the earlier labels mentioned because this label has more closely been linked to the breeders, their pups and the use of clinical protocols such as x-rays, health certifications and DNA testing. These protocols will become the mechanisms by which they intend to measure breeders. The animal rights movement believes that all breeders should screen and test all of their breeding stock as the first step to producing the pups they will sell. While most breeders' support being labeled a "responsible breeder" they fail to see that they will be expected to screen and test all their pups. Since the AKC has already collected DNA on more than 350,000 dogs, one would think that the breeders would have learned more about how the parentage tests works and how the DNA health tests can be used in their breeding program. The truth is that very few breeders can explain the DNA parentage test or how it is being used to preserve the integrity of the stud book. One would also expect that because of the widespread support for DNA health testing more breeders would be using the 35 plus DNA health tests that are already available for screening diseases. The record shows just the opposite. Most breeders do not use the DNA parentage test unless it is required and only a small percentage are using the DNA health tests, x-rays or other clinical protocols as a way to eliminate or manage the carriers in their pedigrees. The under-utilization of these technologies in an environment of widespread acceptance confirms that indeed the dog world

"may be asleep at the wheel". This encourages the animal rights groups with their strategy to change breeding practices.

To better understand the dynamics of this gathering storm, one must ask why there is such widespread support for DNA testing and the other health protocols given the small fraction of the breeder's who actually use them. This has yet to be explained but it seems fair to say that the animal rights movement will continue to ask that all breeding stock be screened and tested. In time they will demand health and parentage testing of every litter. As their agenda begins to unfold nothing short of a massive educational program will be able to slow down the effect it will have on the dog world. Notice in Figure 1 how AKC registrations have slowly been reduced. In 2004, of those who purchased an AKC registerable pup only 44% registered them. Experts agree that the reason for this decline is not simple; but the facts show that this has been a nine-year steady decline and it expected to continue.

FIGURE 1

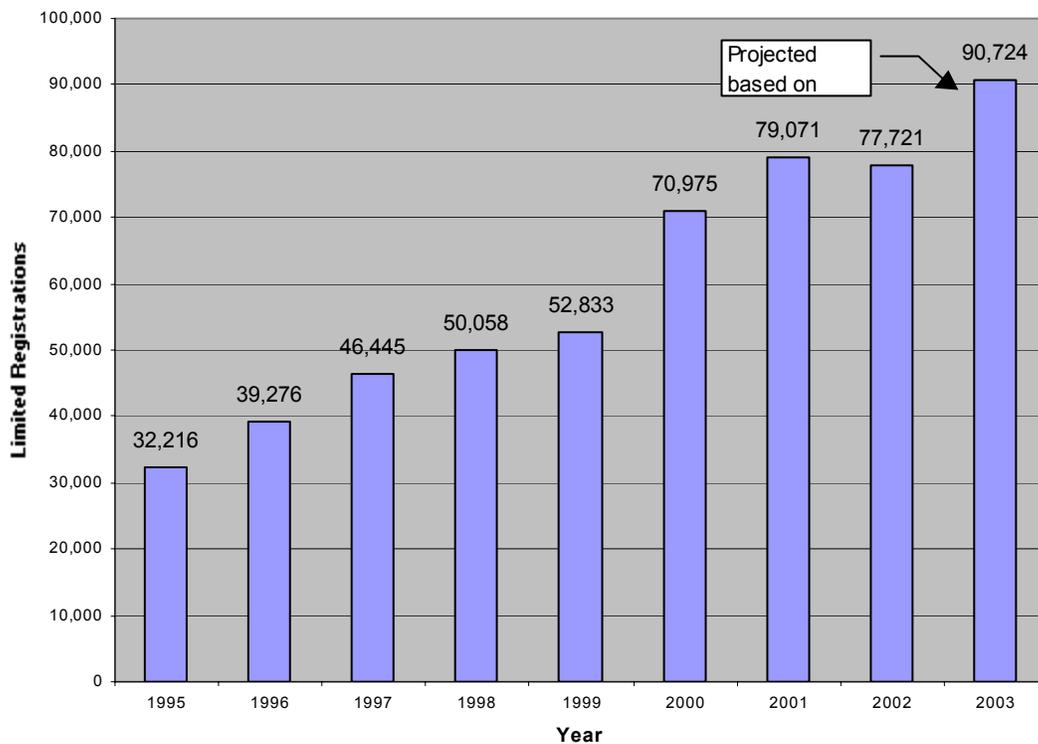


To understand this dilemma and the use of undefined labels we need to examine events that had already emerged by the early 1990's when the high volume breeders were thought to be out of control. In response, DNA technology was offered as the savior of the AKC studbook. As a new technology it was considered the tool by which those suspected of cheating would be caught and punished. It was also during this period that the animal rights movement linked their ideas to several undefined labels which the breeders had made popular. Their strategy has worked only because undefined labels can mean many things to different individuals. Most importantly, they make everyone feel good about their

own beliefs. Over the past 15 years the breeders and the public have been conditioned to accept this approach.

What was not anticipated was how the animal rights movement would create two problems for the "responsible breeder" to solve. The first problem they called "pet overpopulation" which they linked to limited registrations (Figure 2). At the same time they also encouraged the use of spay/neuter contracts. Both ideas were immediately popular and both produced a negative impact on purebred dogs, particularly the gene pools of the 35 breeds seen in Table 1.

FIGURE 2 LIMITED REGISTRATIONS



A brief analysis of the nine year downward trend in registrations (Figure 1) shows that it is inversely related to the steady increase in limited registrations. Breeders are selling pups on limited

registrations and/or spay/neuter contracts in the belief they will help to control the problem that we know does not exist (Strand). Patience on the part of the animal rights movement coupled with the encouragement from the breeders and their clubs has more than tripled the number of dogs removed from the stud book since 1995.

The subtle strategy underlying the use of these undefined labels should not be under-estimated because the important question has been overlooked. Why would breeders want to remove their pups from the gene pool of their own breeds if nothing was wrong with them? What can not be ignored is the fact that the animal rights movement and its critic groups have leveraged their position among the breeders. Most breeders have not noticed how testing has been linked to a way to measure breedings and the quality of the pups produced. The second problem for the "responsible breeder" to solve involves the use of DNA technology, x-rays and other clinical protocols. The goal is to require widespread testing of those saved for breeding. Theoretically this would produce the better individuals. The problem with their logic is that the pups saved may not be the better specimens of their breed based on the breed standard. Saving those who have been tested for health and parentage is not the same as saving those who are the better specimens based on their conformation and temperament. Shifting emphasis to one area is not in the best interests of purebred dogs. While most breeders seem to agree with the concept of screening and testing, many do not realize how it can be used to obligate them to sell more pups on limited registrations and spay/neuter contracts as proof of their being a responsible breeder. The scenarios they are offering lead to the pathway by which breeders and their pups can be quantitatively measured. The good news for the animal rights movement

is that the number of pups sold on limited registrations and spay/neuter contracts can be compared with previous litters. Thus, a determination can be made as to whether the breeder is being responsible or not. This is an important objective to appreciate because it shows how the breeders and their litters will be measured by the numbers. The logic for making the breeder and their pups the next victim and target has been carefully crafted. Unfortunately, it embraces a strategy that already has widespread support.

Table 2. Declining Gene Pools

Registrations (1997-2001)

2001 Rank	Breeds	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
112	Salukis	84	79	80	63	67
113	Belgian Tervuren	84	84	78	89	106
114	Belgian Sheepdogs	83	80	80	85	101
115	Retrievers (Flat-Coated)	82	100	75	98	84
116	Petits Bassets Griffons Vendeen	75	83	72	100	92
117	Bedlington Terriers	66	54	57	56	57
118	Spaniels (Welsh Springer)	61	63	58	57	60
119	Wirehaired pointing Griffons	55	66	44	37	41
120	Briards	51	61	57	60	58
121	Spaniels (American Water)	49	45	57	62	68
122	Lowchen	49	44	37	24	35
123	Spaniels (Clumber)	47	60	43	51	46
124	Black and Tan Coonhounds	47	47	48	55	57
125	Anatolian Shepherds	42	48	49	41	45
126	Pulik	40	36	48	36	46
127	Polish Lowland Sheepdogs	40	38	28	0	0
128	Miniature Bull Terriers	40	42	49	42	44

129	Kuvaszok	35	48	49	59	84
130	Spinone Italiano	33	6			
131	Finnish Spitz	30	27	30	27	39
132	Scottish Deerhounds	28	28	27	27	33
133	Retrievers (Curly-Coated)	27	25	25	31	28
134	Komondorok	26	23	32	31	40
135	Canaan Dogs	26	25	20	18	11
136	Spaniels (Field)	25	28	28	36	29
137	Spaniels (Irish Water)	25	23	33	22	21
138	Greyhounds	25	30	24	32	29
139	Sealyham Terriers	24	18	21	17	28
140	Skye Terriers	24	23	25	38	31
141	Pharaoh Hounds	23	19	16	20	19
142	German Pinschers	23				
143	Spaniels (Sussex)	20	16	21	22	16
144	Dandie Dinmont Terriers	20	33	38	30	33
145	Ibizan Hounds	18	12	13	17	19
146	Plotts	18	35	30	8	0
147	Foxhounds (American)	18	14	14	15	13
148	Harriers	11	6	6	10	11
149	Otterhounds	8	7	2	4	9
150	Foxhounds (English)	7	8	5	7	6
		2001	2000	1999	1998	1997
	Total for all 150 breeds	461,863	506,72	527,02	555,964	564,165
			7	3		

Who would have suspected that in just nine years, the blind acceptance of undefined labels would have significantly reduced the size of the

AKC stud book and the gene pools of 35 breeds (Table 2). There are no accurate figures on the number of pups sold on limited registrations that were not registered but some estimates suggest the number may be at least another 100,000 per year. When the effects of both are taken as a whole, no one can question their impact on declining registrations, gene pool size and genetic diversity. It has been astonishing. The unintended consequences of these efforts have no equal.

The impact of this storm can be viewed in yet another way. In 1981, AKC derived 96% of its income from dog registrations. By 2003, income from registrations had fallen to 61%. These declines represent a significant loss in revenues and future earnings. What makes this all so important is that AKC has been forced to find alternative sources of income to support its 18,000 dog events, its one-of-kind library, health research grants, veterinary scholarships etc. During the past decade twenty-three for-profit registries have emerged to compete with the AKC. In time, they could diminish AKC's position of influence if they continue to grow at their current pace. Of equal concern is the growth and effectiveness of the animal rights agenda. The growing number of breeders that seek to wear the label "responsible breeder" should serve as the foundation for this concern. While no definition exists for this label, the negative effect it has already produced is clear. The critic groups are prepared, poised and ready to propose legislation that will further define and measure breeders by what they produce and sell. They have crafted a strategy that carefully identifies the breeder and their pups as both the victim and the target.

Given the events described, no one should wonder if there is a gathering storm. The howling winds are everywhere and with them come a new and different kind of thinking. In retrospect, this might be a good time to ask where we do we stand after ten years of undefined labels and the blind acceptance of DNA. In the rush to be first, some clubs have already begun to implement mandatory DNA programs. Acceptance of such a requirement without understanding is certain to produce unrealistic goals with unintended consequences. In the midst of what seems to be more confusion, we must find the time to step back and ask the big question. Where do we stand after ten years of undefined labels and the announcement that DNA testing would be used to rid the studbook of errors and clean out the cheaters? Many are beginning to question if the strategy may have been deeply inadequate especially in light of the fact that no one has defined the problems to be solved or their intended solutions. Perhaps out of fear and confusion we have failed to define the means by which we would know when we have solved the perceived problems. We should also remind ourselves that today, breeding is no longer an "elitist" hobby and its rewards as either a pastime or a profession are no longer a well-kept secret. Anyone can become a breeder. There are no entrance exams, no rules and no penalties. No organization serves to punish those who make mistakes or those who produce poor quality pups. Anyone of our neighbors can claim to be a breeder.

This dilemma will continue to worsen if the breeders, veterinary schools, shelters and others continue to accept and use undefined labels. Selling pups as a hobby and breeding has already been stigmatized and many believe this is only the first inning. By the fifth, they will be asking for a higher standard and acceptance of the

principles that will produce a new kind of animal husbandry. In their world, fewer dogs and fewer litters are better. While the options to the future are still open, a massive educational program begs to be ignited. At the end of the day, the clubs their breeders, vet schools and shelters must settle on a definition for the "puppy mill", "responsible breeder", "responsible dog owner", "viscous dog", "dangerous dog" etc. They must also articulate the vision, goals and objectives. These efforts must become the centerpiece of their educational programs.

Conclusion

History's judgment will not wait to see what actions the dog world chooses to take. The polarization of the sport is well underway. The efforts made to date have largely focused on the use of seminars held annually which have not been sufficient enough to reach the fancy and the growing number of new breeders spread across America. Programs that are fresh, brisk and focused must be designed with the help of experienced leaders in the dog world and the research community. The subject matter must, as a minimum, define the undefined labels and address the utilization of DNA technology, the better breeding methods, pedigree analysis and selection techniques, modes of inheritance, the management of carriers, formula breeding and legislation. The time we have is slipping away. The storm has arrived. Boarding up the windows and the doors will no longer be good enough as a way to survive it. The future should not be left to chance, the novice or the animal rights movement.

If you would care to express your ideas on this subject, forward them to me in care of the editor at K9CHRON@aol.com

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About the AUTHOR

Carmen L Battaglia holds a Ph.D. and Masters Degree from Florida State University. He is an author of many articles and several books, an AKC judge, researcher, well known lecturer on the breeding of better dogs and in the management of clubs. For more information about his writings go to: www.breedingbetterdogs.com