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FACTS ABOUT ANIMAL SHELTERING

Across the United States, staff and volunteers in animal shelters and animal control facilities see the results of irresponsible pet ownership and dog and cat overpopulation every day. However, there is very little reliable data available to illustrate this issue on a national level. The following figures were gleaned from independent random studies and the best estimates by experts in the animal welfare and related fields. These should be considered ballpark figures only. Most of the studies were national and there is tremendous variation by region.

There are about 5,000 community animal shelters nationwide that are independent; there is no national organization monitoring these shelters. The phrases “humane society” and “SPCA” are generic terms; shelters using those names are not part of the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) or the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Currently, no government institution or animal organization is responsible for tabulating national statistics for the animal protection movement.

2005 Figures

Animal Shelters

- Approximately eight to 12 million companion animals enter animal shelters nationwide every year and approximately five to nine million are euthanized due to a lack of space or resources to adequately care for them (60 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats). Shelter intakes are about evenly divided between those relinquished by owners and those picked up by animal control. These are national estimates; the percentage of euthanasia may vary from state to state.
- Less than two percent of cats and only 15 to 20 percent of dogs are returned to their owners.* Most of these were identified with tags, tattoos or microchips.
- Twenty five percent of dogs that enter local shelters are purebred.*
- Only 10 percent of the animals received by shelters have been spayed or neutered. Seventy five percent of owned pets are neutered.

Pet Overpopulation

- The average number of litters a fertile cat produces is one to two a year; the average number of kittens in litters is between four and six.
- The average number of litters a fertile dog produces is one a year; the average number of puppies in litters is between four and six.
- It is impossible to determine how many stray dogs and cats live in the US; estimates for cats alone range up to 70 million.
- Owned cats and dogs generally live longer, healthier lives than strays.
- Many strays are lost pets that were not kept properly indoors or provided with identification.

Pet Ownership

- About 63 percent of all households in the United States have a pet.⁺
- About 60 million dogs and about 75 million cats are owned in the United States.⁺⁺
- About 65 percent of pet owners acquire their pets free or at low cost. *
- The majority of pets are obtained from acquaintances and family members. Fifteen to 20 percent of dogs are purchased from breeders, 10 to 20 percent of cats and dogs are adopted from shelters and rescues, and two to 10 percent are purchased from pet shops.⁺⁺⁺
- At least 20 percent of cats are acquired as strays.*
- More than 20 percent of people who leave dogs in shelters adopted them from a shelter.*
- The cost of spaying or neutering a pet is less than the cost of raising puppies or kittens for one year.
- The average cost of basic food, supplies, and medical care and training for a dog or cat is \$400 to \$700 annually.

All data are ASPCA estimates unless otherwise indicated.

⁺ Source: 2005/2006 APPMA (American Pet Products Manufacturers Association) National Pet Owners Survey.

⁺⁺ Source: The Pet Food Institute.

* Source: The National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy (NCPSP).

⁺⁺⁺ Source: Ralston Purina and NCPSP.

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