

## **Dog Breeder's Code of Ethics**

by Tamara Follett, ThunderHawk Caucasians

It is common knowledge that there is a severe pet overpopulation problem besetting our nation today. Each year, millions of perfectly healthy, happy pets -- many of them purebred -- are euthanized simply because there are not enough homes for all of these animals. So how can we, as dog breeders, justify putting even one more animal on the face of this earth? The answer is that we can only justify it by producing better dogs. Better dogs that will provide better service, more reliable temperaments, and greater health than the dogs here now. History has set the rules by which we can accomplish this; the process is well-known, and documented. In addition, we can address, in some small manner, the pet overpopulation problem by not wantonly overbreeding and by ensuring that we do not contribute to the already overwhelming pet overpopulation problems. In short, we justify our right to produce more lives by virtue of the quality of the lives and the integrity with which we produce them. By being Ethical Breeders. So there are valid reasons for being a so-called "Ethical Breeder" that have nothing to do with peer pressure. To summarize the issues, being ethical breeders means adhering to the following:

### **As Ethical Breeders, We Must:**

- ➔ Breed only to get our next generation and never breed just for the sake of breeding or to make money.
- ➔ Breed only to improve the breed. Breed only the best dogs we can find/afford and don't breed what we have just because it's what we already have.
- ➔ Study the breed until we know enough about the breed temperamentally, conformationally, and genetically to select parents that will improve the breed, not just add to the numbers. Our goal is to produce pups that are better than the sum of the parents. Only then can we say we are improving the breed. Only then is there a semblance of a reason for us to breed.
- ➔ Be objective enough with our own stock to effectively evaluate its contribution to the gene pool. We must love the **breed** more than the **individual**, and we must preserve and protect the gene pool even if it means omitting our own stock from that gene pool in order to protect it.
- ➔ Be responsible enough to study the genetics of dog breeding in general, and of our breed in particular, before the litter is born that has all the genetic problems.
- ➔ Take responsibility for the lives we create by always taking back our own stock so that no dog we ever produce ends up in a pound, adding to the animal overpopulation problem.
- ➔ Be knowledgeable enough in our breed that we can effectively educate potential puppy buyers about the breed's positive and negative traits so that our pups go to prepared, responsible, loving homes.
- ➔ Love our own breeding stock enough to ensure that the dam and sire are physically and mentally healthy before breeding.
- ➔ Be responsible enough not to breed until we have enough homes lined up for the pups we produce. Be responsible enough to keep the pups we can't place instead of selling them

cheap to whoever answers the ad, or dumping them at a shelter or with the local breed rescue group.

→ Be responsible enough to put our pups out on spay/neuter contracts (or better still, use Early Spay/Neuter) to ensure that our care in protecting the gene pool is not ruined by someone else overbreeding one of our pups.

→ Back our faith in our breeding program with a meaningful guarantee, which only requires a spay/neuter certificate or a letter from the veterinarian and not return or euthanasia of the dog to invoke the guarantee.

→ Recognize that not everyone who wants a dog should have one and that not everyone who gets a dog will keep it. We must be careful in our placements. We owe it to our pups and to the breed itself.

→ Educate potential breeders that this effort should not be undertaken lightly. Dogs love us. They are born loving us, and unlike cows or horses, sheep or parakeets, it is in every fiber of the dog's being to love man. We owe a great debt to them, for their loyalty, for their service, and for their unconditional love. The least we can do is to protect them in turn.

Goethe said, "I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element." He is right. The responsibility begins here. We, each of us, through our thoughts, our actions, our decisions, shape the future of our breed. We cannot counter the animals rights activist who would ban purebred breeding, we cannot face the overworked animal rescue groups, unless -- minimally-- we are breeding to improve the breed and we are not adding to the overpopulation problem. And unless and until we can face our own image in the mirror and state with certainty, **"I am protecting the gene pool and improving my breed"** we should not be breeding.

**New Breeder Questionnaire**  
by Tamara Follett, ThunderHawk Caucasians

Breeding a litter of puppies incurs a lifetime of responsibility to the lives you've produced, the people you have sold to, and the breed whose gene pool you are affecting. Before you breed, answer the following questions to see if you have the resources and commitment to be an ethical breeder. (These, by the way, are established by the "Dog Owing Community" and not by an individual or breed group.) This represents the established criteria by which the ethics of a breeder are measured. In short, this is what it takes to be an ethical breeder. And if you don't have what it takes, DON'T BREED. There are far too many unethical breeders out there already.

- Are you willing to study the breed for two years or more (including as many adults as possible and including at least two top-in-the-country specimens) so that you can make effective temperament/health/genetic/conformation evaluations of your own stock and find a mate that will improve upon your dog?
- Are you willing to do enough breed promotion to have 10 or more homes lined up for your pups before you breed?
- Are you willing to do full health and genetic screening of each dog before it is bred -- (approximately \$477 or more per dog)?
- Are you willing not to breed if your dog has genetic/temperament/health problems?
- Are you willing to back your belief in the integrity of your breeding program with a written, money-back, lifetime guarantee on the genetic health and temperament of your pups? (A real guarantee, not one that requires the return or euthanasia of the animal.)
- Are you willing to screen potential homes to find only the best homes for your pups? Do you require that an application be completed by potential homes, and do you interview prospective owners to eliminate the irresponsible or the "status symbol seekers"?
- Spay/Neuter Contracts don't work -- the American Humane Association states that there is frequently only a 10%-50% compliance rate with them -- Are you willing to do Early Spay/Neuter on most of your pups so that only ethical breeders can breed your stock? Are you willing to incur that extra expense and hassle? Do you love your breed enough to protect it?
- Are you willing to screen potential breeders so that another puppy mill doesn't get ahold of your breed? Do you check references to ensure your pups won't be used in dog fighting, drug protection, or other illegal or inhumane pursuits?
- Are you willing to keep the 6 pups you didn't place? Do you have the room and the financial wherewithal to support them as six grown dogs? Or would you find it easier to dump them at a shelter at 6 months old?
- Do you want to be responsible for all 12 of your puppies for the rest of their lives? You must take back any dog, for any reason, at any time in the future, for the rest of your pups' lives. To do less is to function as a puppy mill -- the definition of unethical.

→ Are you willing to support your pups' owners when they have an aggression problem? Do you know enough about your breed's temperament to be able to help them? Can you differentiate --based on a verbal description alone-- between fear aggression, dog aggression, dominance aggression, and food aggression? Can you give constructive advice to an owner with one or more of these problems, or is your answer to send them to a trainer? (If you don't understand temperament enough to help your puppy buyers, you don't know enough to effectively evaluate correct temperaments in your own breeding stock -- this is where bad temperaments arise from -- ignorance, or Just Not Caring.)

→ Are you willing to take back your pup (now 6 years old) because the owner died/divorced/-moved/doesn't want the dog anymore? Do you have the room to take back multiple adult dogs? Do you have the time (up to six months) to rehabilitate/retrain them and place them in new, loving homes?

We are walking the ragged edge with temperament in this breed -- too little aggression, and we've lost the working ability of this breed, too much and we have created a monster...

→ Do you understand the genetics of temperament, its heritability, and the potential for outliers in any given litter's temperament distribution? If you don't, how can you make effective breeding decisions in the pairing of temperaments? --This is like playing with dynamite when you don't know what you are doing.

→ Are you willing to do whatever it takes to let a potential home know how aggressive this breed is before they buy, so they can make an informed decision? (This may include racking up extensive phone bills and/or providing written breed information including "worst case scenarios" to help the message sink in.)

→ Are you willing to follow up with your pups' owners on a regular basis to help them with any training or aggression issues they are facing? Do you have the knowledge to recognize a problem before it develops?

→ Are you willing to take responsibility for the person who gets attacked because you forgot to tell the owner not to stake the dog out?

→ Are you willing to take back a dog that has bitten 3 people already and have it humanely destroyed?

If you answered "No" to any one of these questions, you should not breed. **Period.**