



Why Dogs aren't Dairy Cows

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We factory farm many animals in Australia- cattle, sheep, pigs and chicken to mention a few. So why shouldn't we permit the factory farming of dogs?

My experience with factory farmed dogs comes from different perspectives. I have seen both the offspring of the dogs once enrolled in training, as well as the breeding dogs themselves, most often after years of confined existence when they come into rescue or shelter situations and have to be assessed before potential rehoming.

So what impact does factory farming actually have? Puppy farming has significant adverse impact- on the offspring produced, the breeding dogs as well as the greater community. We must look beyond the basic provision of food, water and shelter to consider the costs of a farm environment for a companion animal.

It is well known and accepted among both dog training and scientific circles that domestic canines have a critical period of socialisation- aptly named as it is the most critical time for a puppy's social development and well being. A pup's brain grows to 80% of its size during this period and the learning during this time frame remains with the dog for the entirety of his life. A critical period occurs once in a dogs' life; we get one chance and one chance only.

This time period starts when the dog is born and continues until the age of 16 weeks. Half of this critical time is spent with the breeder of a puppy, before the new owner has any input. A dog can be made or broken during this time- before even entering the home where he will spend his life.

The breeders input during this time, through gentle handling, gradual exposure to new and novel things and interactions with people can shape the puppy into a well adjusted dog, who is able to fit into a home environment with relative ease. Lack of socialisation during this critical time increases the risk of emotional reactivity in adult hood as well as creating more immediate issues- including but not limited to the following:

- Separation anxiety and separation related behaviour
- General anxiety and low thresholds to stress in a wide range of situations
- Reactive aggression to both people and dogs
- Limited bite inhibition in young pups and dogs
- Mild to extreme stress responses to basic handling and grooming
- Inability to cope with environmental change

Factory farming large numbers of dogs restricts the amount of individual contact the puppy receives as well as limiting safe exposure to a normal household environment- where all of these puppies are

destined to live their lives. Providing for the social needs of one litter of puppies is a demanding task- multiplying this by many litters reduces the quantity and quality of such interactions.

I witness on a weekly basis the effect of limited handling on young puppies. These puppies who attend puppy pre school are far more difficult for their owners to handle and train (this does not refer to obedience training, rather the ability to train the puppy to accept general handling and guidance, toilet training and independence training) than those puppies who have come from breeders who are able to provide more individual care prior to rehoming. We should be raising puppies in environments that enable and assist them to adjust easily into the environment for which they are destined.

This brings us to the breeding dogs of factory farming operations- dogs that live the fertile years of their life breeding many litters, often without respite. Currently, authorities consider a dogs' need for food, water and shelter- as with any other animal. No other animal is bred for human companionship in the same way that a dog is and therefore, the dogs need for social contact, ongoing socialisation and mental exercise should be weighted evenly with these things.

Assessments of dogs who have come direct from factory farming operations show that:

- The dogs are environmentally fearful- any change from their previous confined life results in increased stress levels
- The dogs are often fearful of all dogs or dogs who don't look like the dogs they were kept with. This fear results in panic or aggressive responses on a frequent basis
- Many of the dogs show extreme and deep rooted fear of people- in some cases this is all people, in others it is specific groups of people like children.
- Obsessive compulsive behaviours are common and include tail chasing, self mutilation, flank sucking, pacing and pattern walking
- The dogs often do not understand simple things like walking on a lead, accepting a food reward or playing with toys
- Dogs have poor recovery time to any kind of sudden stimulus or stressor- including noise, a persons approach etc
- These dogs take significantly more time to settle in to a home environment than dogs who have experienced a normal existence with ongoing socialisation, with some taking 6 months to a year to adjust to their home. Most will never recover completely as lack of critical period socialisation is permanent and compounded by the ongoing lack of socialisation and contact with people factory farm dogs' experience.

I urge you to consider these points when where you get your next dog from. Companion animals are exactly that- companions- and they do not cope with being treated as stock. Dogs are not dairy cows.

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