



The International Partnership for Dogs (IPFD) and Pedigree Dogs – You want leadership? We are ready.

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We read with interest your opinion piece "Need for international leadership." Recent regulations for dog shows in Germany are truly ill-advised, some demands are over-the-top, and some not fully evidence-based. The disorganized enactment is inappropriate and targeting the VDH and its members is unfortunate. VDH is a health-conscious kennel club (KC), though participation of breed clubs can be variable. There is no doubt that, as Peter Friedrich (VDH president and IPFD Board member) said, this plays into the hands of non-affiliated breeders and will not improve the health and welfare of most dogs.

However, the idea that all that is needed is a 'public relations plan', is avoiding the real problem and not taking full responsibility. Responsibility means being fully accountable for health and welfare: recognizing problems in some breeds and ensuring that these are effectively addressed, and demonstrating a commitment to maintaining and improving the health of all breeds. There has been denial of scientific, evidence-based information, because it goes against the desires or 'traditions' of some in the show world. The rest of the dog community. (e.g., veterinarians, welfare groups, legislators) understands that people are passionate about the hobby or business of dog shows; what they are looking for is proof – not merely proclamations - that concerns for the dogs come first.

IPFD has been actively supporting pedigree dogs and pedigree breeders for almost 8 years now. But not by blindly supporting all breeding practises or making blanket statements that everything is fine, and all pedigree breeders are doing the right things. IPFD is a multistakeholder organization because the complex problems of dogs will require collective and collaborative action from all those who have a concern for pedigree dogs, and in fact all dogs. IPFD has publicized all the good that comes from the diversity of breeds and the human-animal bond; and we are clear about the proportion of dogs that come from pedigree sources. But IPFD has also been candid where there is evidence that specific breeds are compromised. It is clear that certain practices of pedigree breeders, e.g. the pursuit of extreme characteristics, have led to some of the problems. Without recognizing the attitudes, 'traditions', and actions of the past that have led to today's problems, they will never be resolved.

**Past actions don't need to be reviled; but future actions must be meaningful.**

IPFD has promoted, highlighted, and shared the good work of our Partner KCs and breeders. But our mission is first and foremost for dog health, well-being, and welfare and good human animal interactions. We work to support and promote multi-stakeholder collaboration because pedigree breeders and show people have neither sole rights nor sole responsibility for the health of pedigree dogs. We call on veterinarians to address their responsibilities, share developments from the veterinary world – commenting on them with honesty and transparency, putting actions into context, trying to help breeders understand the challenges of the veterinary world, while also discussing possible unintended consequences from certain actions. We do the same with international legislative and legal actions; again in context and with evidence-based transparency.

We profile what our partner KCs are doing. For example, we have highlighted the excellent work being done in Finland in creating innovative, well-organized, well-followed programs to save endangered and compromised breeds. Sadly, the response from some in the show world has not been positive recognition for kennel and breed clubs making tough decisions for a sustainable future for their dogs, following the laws of their country.

The extensive resources that IPFD has provided on DogWellNet.com – e.g., our Harmonization of Genetic Testing Database, webinars, breeding strategies, and breed-specific statistics - have always been free to all, in support of our goals and those of our contributing partners. Information needed to help all breeders make better breeding decisions, to inform breed clubs and kennel clubs is available; they just have to use it.

Many breeds are 'fit for function' and/or they have (in some countries) good health programs in place. Most of our partner clubs provide excellent resources for their breeders, including breeding statistics, some from great databases that include health and pedigree data. Unfortunately, for some breeds, and in some countries, there may be talk, but little substantive action. Voluntary programs

where only a small proportion of breeders follow guidelines, with no data on findings or on how they are being used in breeding decisions, is not enough to help the dogs and not enough to convince the outside world that pedigree breeders are fully committed to health and welfare. We want to celebrate the healthiest breeds, but we have to be willing to accept that for some breeds there are problems.

What is needed now is a demonstration of substantive and active commitment to responsible dog breeding. Breeding strategies are in place in many countries; many breed clubs and breeders are 'taking responsibility'. Breeders must participate in health programs that address the 'Big Picture' – i.e. all major conditions within a breed; they must follow guidelines, do tests and share the findings; and monitor outcomes. If some breed clubs are challenged in these regards, then KCs must take action – for the good of the sport and the dogs. These substantive actions then need to be widely shared by an independent body, not simply through PR by invested parties. Then you'll have something with which to lobby.

Breeding guidelines such as those issued by the FCI which say: "Only functionally and clinically healthy dogs, with breed typical conformation, should be used for breeding, i.e. to only use dogs that do not suffer from any serious disease or functional disabilities" (<http://www.fci.be/en/Breeding-42.html>) " should be followed, with acknowledgement of what disease and functional disabilities really mean.

Shared responsibility for all dogs, is why other groups act, sometimes unilaterally. IPFD has pointed out how that is not generally effective and often leads to unintended consequences. However, we have long said that if the pedigree world did not step up and take responsibility for problems developed through selective breeding, and did not make substantive changes, then someone else would; and now we have cascading issues in various countries. For most breeders, those who truly care even more for their dogs and breeds than they do for their 'hobby', there are ways forward. Let's act – together.

IPFD is at a crucial point, as are the rest of you. We stand ready to lead, assist, and promote healthy pedigree dogs together with any KCs who are committed to doing the work needed. Please join us.

IPFD is co-hosting a webinar between the Canadian KC and the Canadian Veterinary Medical association, on July 12<sup>th</sup>, where we plan an open discussion on brachycephalic breeds, and the start of collaborative efforts. See: <https://www.ckc.ca/en/Events/Symposium-on-Healthy-Dog-Breeding>

IPFD is also willing to host a (virtual) meeting of concerned kennel clubs to discuss the way forward. If you are interested, let us know at [info@ipfdogs.com](mailto:info@ipfdogs.com), or contact one of us: [Brenda.Bonnett@ipfdogs.com](mailto:Brenda.Bonnett@ipfdogs.com), Veterinary Science Officer, or [Katariina.Maki@ipfdogs.com](mailto:Katariina.Maki@ipfdogs.com), Acting CEO; or our Chair, [Pekka.Olson@skk.se](mailto:Pekka.Olson@skk.se).

