

'Never acquire a pet based on mere appearance', Finnish vets urge

29 May 2018 - According to the Finnish Veterinary Association breeding based on special physical attributes and emphasizing the extremes has reached the end of the road.

The purpose of a pet dog or cat is to be a companion, to enjoy a long life and be able to function properly. All dog and cat owners, those contemplating to become pet owners, breeders as well as dog and cat show judges, **must focus more on nurturing the health and wellbeing of pets, rather than their appearance.**

Advertising and marketing professionals are requested to **not use pictures of short-nosed or otherwise disproportionate pets in advertising.**

The health of many dog and cat breeds has suffered because of the focus on extreme physical attributes. Features detrimental to the wellbeing of the animal include a very short or virtually non-existent nose, short legs, abundant skin folds and a disproportionate structure with short legs and a long back. Progress in improving the health of breeds is slow because breeding choices are still determined by conformation and success in shows.

Studies show that only 10% of short-nosed, that is, brachycephalic dogs can breathe normally. In addition to respiratory problems, breeding based only on specific physical attributes has resulted in painful bone, ear, eye and skin disorders for the pets. The use of health examinations as tools for improving the health and wellbeing of pets must be encouraged. If healthy specimens are hard to find in a certain breed, the possibility of crossbreeding should be considered without bias.

Despite the ongoing discussion on the health problems that short-nosed dogs and cats suffer from, these breeds are increasingly popular both in Finland and internationally. **The Finnish Veterinary Association urges everyone contemplating to become a pet owner to study the health status of the breed considered and to discuss this with a veterinarian.**

The Finnish Veterinary Association pleads to professionals in advertising, marketing and communication to avoid using pictures of short-nosed or otherwise disproportionate dogs and cats in advertising, as the use of such pictures will increase the popularity of these breeds. Consumers also do a favour for animals if they refrain from buying products that are marketed using the images of pets suffering the ill effects from breeding. In addition to voluntary action, **legislative measures are needed** to intervene with animal breeders who ignore animal health and welfare.

The Finnish Veterinary Association is involved in preparing guidelines for both health examinations for breeding purposes and the control of breeding.

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