BREEDING FOR EXTREME CONFORMATIONS

What is the problem?

Extreme conformation of pets by selecting for a particular ‘look’ (e.g. flat nose, sloping back, bulging or droopy eyes, skin folds, round skull) to the point of causing animal suffering.

Causes

- Increased demand (fashion) of certain breeds, boosted by advertising, movies, social media and celebrities
- Lack of owner awareness about the health and welfare impact of extreme breeding (e.g. thinking that snoring is normal)
- Lack of regulations (e.g. extreme breeding, breeding conditions)

Consequences for animals

- Extreme looks (conformation) can lead to poor animal health and welfare to the point of animal suffering (struggling to breathe, overheating, joint pain, sore skin, eye ulcers…)
- They may need invasive surgery in order to breathe or walk normally, and often need a caesarean section when giving birth
- Intensive interbreeding can pass on genetic disorders, causing suffering and early death

Consequences for owners

- High unexpected medical and surgical bills
- Heartache due to poor health and welfare or early death of their pet
- Complicated care of unhealthy dogs (avoid warm weather, excitement, activities)
- Unmet expectations of pet ownership
- Emotional and legal hurdles for dealing with unhealthy animals

Consequences for society

- More and more unscrupulous breeders and puppy farms to satisfy demand
- Behavioural problems if dogs are from an uncertain source (due to early weaning, poor socialisation)
- Higher risk of introducing disease with dogs that come from abroad (e.g. rabies, resistant bacteria, disease-carrying ticks and fleas)
- Increased numbers of unwanted puppies and dogs

Although pugs dominate on this page, many other breeds and animals are also affected by extreme breeding.
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What can we do?

**Pet owners**
- Consult a vet before you buy a dog
- Don’t buy pets with extreme breeding features
- Don’t buy a dog or cat online or from an uncertain source
- If buying a pedigree puppy, always ask to see its mother and sign a puppy contract
- Check that the animal is identified and registered

**Veterinary organisations & animal charities**
- Raise awareness about the risks of extreme breeding
- Create and promote veterinary health certificates and puppy contracts
- Encourage health screening before breeding
- Set up a system for vets to share data on health screening, corrective surgery and caesareans due to extreme breeding
- Work with national kennel clubs to share these data

**Veterinarians**
- Advise (future) owners and breeders on animal health and welfare
- Don’t ‘normalise’ extreme breeding traits (e.g. snoring)
- Record all health and welfare issues related to extreme breeding
- Report corrective surgery and caesareans due to extreme breeding
- Only carry out caesarean sections in emergencies
- Avoid artificial insemination if the dog or cat is incapable of mating or giving birth alone

**Dog and cat breeders**
- Choose health and welfare over looks when breeding
- Don’t breed from animals with extreme traits
- Have a vet check your dogs for health and functionality before breeding
- Consider cross-breeding if extreme features impact dog health and welfare
- Don’t ‘normalise’ extreme breeding traits (e.g. snoring)
- Correctly identify and register all puppies and kittens
- Don’t sell animals under 8 weeks of age or 16 weeks if sold abroad

**Politicians & legislators**
- Ban extreme breeding to protect animal welfare
- Impose health and welfare standards in dog and cat breeding
- Make microchipping and registration of dogs and cats mandatory
- Improve border checks on pets
- Enforce legislation with high penalties
- Help raise awareness about extreme breeding

**Breeding associations & kennel clubs**
- Revise breeding standards to prevent extreme breeding
- Encourage breeders to breed for health not just looks
- Train show judges to recognise healthy animals
- Don’t accept or reward extreme breeding features at shows
- Set up pre-breeding health screening programmes
- Work with vets to collect data on health screening, corrective surgery and caesareans due to extreme breeding

**Researchers & educators**
- Train vets and breeders on breed-related health and welfare issues
- Study the impact of extreme breeding on health and welfare of dogs and cats
- Develop evidence-based limits on physical features or function tests

**Advertisers, filmmakers, social media users**
- Don’t use dogs with extreme breeding features (or their cartoons) in commercials, advertisements and movies
- Don’t create or share ‘funny’ videos of pets that struggle to breathe, exercise or show other signs of extreme breeding
- Help raise awareness about extreme breeding

**Celebrities and VIPs**
- Don’t buy or promote pets with extreme breeding features
- Help raise awareness about extreme breeding

More information?
- www.fve.org
- www.fecava.org

This infographic was produced jointly by the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe and the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations. A joint FVE/FECAVA position paper on healthy breeding was adopted in June 2018. Please visit our respective websites for details.