

QUIZ YOURSELF: WHAT DO YOU KNOW... About Companion Animal Management in Your Community?

"To look clearly at any injustice is the first step in righting it."

With declining economic resources, steadily increasing animal ownership, and a very weak system of legal protection for animals, the U.S. is experiencing a burgeoning crisis in animal management and welfare. Tragic cases of abuse and neglect are disturbingly rampant. Most animal management takes place on a very local level. Following are various questions that address important elements of community animal management. Many of these issues are commonly misunderstood. Exploration of these questions with friends, family, and neighbors will help you better understand important factors that affect animal management and possible approaches for increasing the humane management of animals in your community.

What kinds of animal management challenges does your community face?

- Feral cats?
- Neglected dogs / tethered dogs?
- Stray dogs?
- Bite cases / Dangerous dogs?
- Owners unable to finance proper care?
- Lack of awareness? Challenging cultural habits/resistance?
- Non-compliance with basic animal laws?
- Animal abuse?
- Backyard breeding?
- Puppy Mills?
- Animal Fighting?
- Hunting dog misuse/neglect?

Others:

Animal Shelters

- What animal shelters, public and non-profit, serve your community?
- What's the difference between a pound, an spca, a humane society, and a rescue agency?
- Is your public animal sheltering service provided independently by the community government (e.g. county pound)? Or is it provided on a contractual basis with a non-profit agency?
- What is an "open-admission" shelter? Is your public shelter open-admission?
- What is a "no-kill" shelter? What shelters in your community qualify as "no-kill"? Are these shelters also "open-admission"?
- What non-profit animal welfare agencies are available to serve your community? What services do they provide?

Animal Control Services and the Law

- Where can you find the Virginia state laws pertaining to animal care? Local public laws (ordinances)?
- For what animals are licenses required by law in Virginia?
- What is the fee for licensing (registering) an animal (dog, cat) in your community? What is the penalty for violation? How effectively is this enforced?
- Does your community have an ordinance to limit the free roaming of dogs? (Running-at-large or leash ordinance.)
- Is it legal for pet owners to breed their dogs and cats without regulation? What if the dog or cat was adopted from the shelter?
- If you find an injured animal in need of emergency care and you report this to Animal Control, is the Animal Control Officer required to obtain essential care for this animal?
- Does the unlimited tethering of animals create any problems in your community? Is there a law to limit tethering? If not, should there be one?
- What is the name of your chief Animal Control Officer and what's the AC telephone number?

Animal Management Funding:

- How much do your community taxpayers pay for animal management (control and sheltering)? Is this too much, enough, not enough?
- To what degree do you think the public (i.e. tax dollars) should be responsible for the re-homing and care of unwanted animals? How can/do non-profit agencies in your community provide assistance?

- Education and prevention of irresponsible pet care.
 - Trapping, catching, and holding of stray animals
 - Community safety – bites, fights, etc.
 - Pursuit and prosecution of those in violation of animal laws.
 - Spay/neuter, medical, and behavioral care for animals available for adoption?
 - Promotion and outreach for adoption of available animals.
- What is the daily cost of keeping an animal in the public shelter? What is the fee charged for adopting an animal? Does this fee include spay/neuter and vaccines? Do you think the fee is reasonable?
 - How much is collected via licensing, other fees, and punitive fines? Do these funds go back into animal management or into the general fund? Do these fees contribute significantly to the effective management of animals in the community?
 - If an individual is unable to meet the costs of owning an animal in accordance with the law (licensing, food, shelter, veterinary care) should they be allowed to continue owning an animal? If so, who should carry the costs of keeping this ownership within the limits of the law?
 - Are there programs in place to make low-cost services available? If not, in what ways can/should the community assist the animals kept by individuals with low income?

Community Education and Support:

- Does your community actively promote adherence to animal law? In what ways? In what ways could this be improved upon?
- Does your community encourage adoption of rescued pets as opposed to buying pets? In what ways? Ideas for improvement?
- Is effective animal care education available in your community? Through what channels? If not, what steps could be taken to provide more education?
- Does your community have a program designed to help keep animals successfully in their homes and avoid owner surrenders (i.e. pet retention program)? Who runs the program? Does it meet significant needs in the community? If no such program exists, what components do you think such a program should include and who do you think could manage this program in your community?
- Does your local population support the idea of humane, effective animal management? Will they support your initiatives when proposed to county administration? If not, how can you work to gain their support?
- Are the animal care professionals (e.g. vets, kennels, trainers) in your community willing to support efforts towards humane animal management? If not, have they been approached in a way that gives them viable opportunities to do so? If so, is there a structured system for incorporating their support and recognizing their contributions?

And most importantly:

How do your community's leaders (shelter directors, AC directors, law enforcement leaders, social service leaders, county/city administrators, supervisors) respond to the idea of effective, humane animal management in order to decrease strays, euthanasia, and illegal practices; and to increase responsible animal ownership and community safety? **If you have not spoken with them about these issues, perhaps now is a good time.**

