

The New York State Animal Population Control Program

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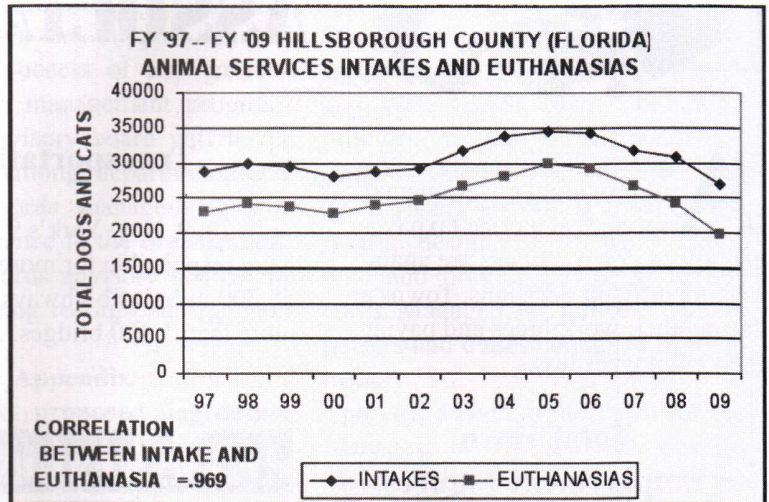
We can't adopt our way out of the problem. For those in the animal welfare community, this is an old saw, one that refers to the well-settled principle that only a decline in the rate of animal intakes at shelters, not increased adoptions, will reduce the number of animals killed in shelters. In fact, shelter deaths track animal intake almost exactly, their close correlation apparent from the accompanying animal control data from Hillsborough County, Florida (at right).

A prominent example of adoption efforts by themselves not reducing shelter deaths is California, where despite a vigorous network of rescue organizations, a relatively weak network of low-cost or free spay/neuter services allowed shelter intake to jump by 106,404 (from 729,238 animals to 835,642) between 2004 and 2008, and shelter deaths to increase by 54,000 (from 378,445 animals to 432,412). By contrast, between 1993 and 2000, New Hampshire's statewide animal population control program - funded, like New York's, by a surcharge on dog licenses - reduced shelter intake by 37,210 animals, or 34 percent, over the prior seven years, and reduced annual shelter deaths by just under 9,000 animals (11,494 animals to 2,575), or more than 75 percent. During this same period, New Hampshire saw its human population grow by 7.2 percent; nevertheless, shelter intake and euthanasia continued to decrease.

These numbers were on the collective mind of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and the New York Animal Protection Federation when, in 2010, we challenged an executive budget

proposal to eliminate the New York State Animal Population Control Program (APCP). Between 1996 and 2009, the APCP, drawing on a fund supported by a \$3 surcharge on unaltered dog licenses, had issued vouchers financing 90,000 spay/neuter surgeries for adopted cats and dogs and the pets of low-income New York State residents, or just under 700 surgeries per year. And in 2009, the final year of the APCP's operation prior to its suspension by the Department of Agriculture and Markets and subsequent reconfiguration as part of the budget process, the need for these services had not diminished, as evidenced by the number of surgeries performed on the pets of public assistance recipients, which showed an increase from prior years in every category (female/male cat; female/male dog). The ASPCA and the federation understood that a better designed APCP could conceivably reach more owners and animals, but this was reason to improve the program, not dismantle it.

Moreover, in New York State, where all municipalities are statutorily required to have a shelter or to contract with one for services, no town or city would be immune from the humane, fiscal and public health



and safety problems that would accumulate with reduced pet sterilization, increased relinquishment of pets to shelters, an increased stray population and a spiraling shelter intake and euthanasia rate. In this connection, it is worth noting both the lower pet sterilization rates and also the higher pet relinquishment rates of low income households. Without the financial assistance supplied by the APCP, these households and their pets would not likely obtain spay/neuter services, a result that would reverberate throughout communities as shelters dealt with (1) increased animal control costs associated with picking up more stray animals and holding more animals until death in lieu of the simple remittance of dog license surcharges to finance the APCP (on a statewide basis, for every \$1 spent on a robust spay/neuter program, more than three times as much, or \$3.15, is spent on impoundment until an animal's death); (2) public health and safety concerns regarding expanding stray populations and the increased

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incidence of aggression in intact male dogs (intact male dogs are involved in 70 to 76 percent of reported dog bite incidents and are 2.6 times more likely to bite than neutered dogs, and in fact, the impetus for the Illinois APCP was the mauling death of a jogger by a feral dog pack); and (3) public outrage at the increased killing of healthy animals and/or shelter overcrowding (after the recent raid on the Wyoming County SPCA, one volunteer lamented how “overwhelmed” by cats and kittens the shelter had been).

The New York State APCP was re-configured by the Legislature in 2010 to ensure both program sustainability and also greater access to spay/neuter services by low-income residents and shelter adopters. In particular, the introduction of a new competitive grants-based scheme in which service providers apply for funds was intended to drive down spay/neuter costs and thereby free up funds to support additional spay/neuter efforts. Also, unlike the prior voucher program, which paid for individual sterilizations, an advantage of the new grants-based program was its ability to fund “big projects” (e.g., capital improvements, equipment, vehicles for mobile spay/neuter or animal transport) that might be required by a community in order to provide or grow its spay/neuter capacity. Indeed, a snapshot of remittances by county to the APCP from 2004-2006, in which the average remittance was only about \$13,500 over this three-year period, suggests the critical role for the APCP – with its access to a concentrated amount of money – in financing spay-neuter services in any given locality. It is certainly hard to imagine how any locality would afford recent APCP grant requests. Some examples: equipment sterilizer - \$35,369; payroll support - \$31,520; spay/neuter services - \$50,000; spay/neuter services

- \$107,000 (over a two-year period).

Further, by adding a \$1 surcharge on altered dog licenses (in addition to the \$3 on unaltered dog licenses), investing administrative authority in a non-profit organization in lieu of the Department of Agriculture and requiring the agency’s quarterly release of municipal license surcharge money to this non-profit administrator, the Legislature made the program more robust, kept program overhead costs low (in fact, the current program administrator – the ASPCA – voluntarily declined an administrative fee), and eliminated the danger posed by the state “sweeps” that previously plagued the program, resulting in the loss of \$1.3 million to the state’s general fund.

In its *Guide to Animal Control Management*, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) indicates that an effective animal control program (which ICMA defines as one that “not only saves cities and counties on present costs – by protect-

ing citizens from dangerous dogs, for example – but also helps to reduce the costs of animal control in the future”) cannot exist in the absence of a publicly funded spay/neuter assistance program.

The ASPCA hopes that the humane, fiscal and public safety benefits offered by the APCP will, in the final analysis, outweigh any opposition based on home rule and that town officials will support the program by remitting the required dog licenses surcharges.

Currently, the Assembly and Senate are considering legislation A. 7140/S. 5842 to clarify the monthly municipal remittance schedule for dog license surcharges, legislation that the Association of Towns opposed in 2011.

To apply for an APCP grant, please go to www.aspcapro.org/grants and click on “Request for Proposals: NYS Animal Population Control Program.” The process is quick and paperless, and there is no limit on the number of applications that may be submitted. ❖

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