



Below is an edited transcript of the Q&A portion of Life of Riley's January 16th, 2025 webinar: *An Introduction to Canine Care Certified* with Dr. Candace Croney. Also included are responses to additional participant questions that Dr. Croney did not have time to answer during the live webinar. **Any views or opinions presented here are solely those of the speaker and do not necessarily represent those of Spring Point Partners.**

Q1: *Could you speak more to the idea that data supports "supply not matching demand," rather than folks getting dogs from other sources?*

If what's available in shelters/rescues does not match what people want, why doesn't that suggest that they're finding dogs from other sources? Or is the conclusion that they're then not getting dogs at all?

Dr. Croney: Let me clarify, and thank you for the question. There's been this long established narrative that there is a dog population problem in the United States. It's not necessarilyan overpopulation problem that is [the reason]....dogs are sitting in shelters not being adopted.

I'm going to qualify [that] with circumstances and times changing...In this past year, I can't tell you there was an overpopulation problem. But what I do know is that we definitely had a problem. And some of that is the confluence of a bunch of really, really unfortunate factors coming into play at the same time: economics and inflation and so on.....

But what I will tell you is oftentimes there is a mismatch between what is in the shelters that people have access to locally versus the demographics they want in dogs. In other words, there are dogs in shelters and they need homes, but those are not the dogs, for whatever reason, that many people want.

And so there is a mismatch there between what is available, versus what people want. And this idea that you can just force people or shame them into taking a dog they don't want isn't borne out in terms of it actually addressing the supply demand gap. Because we've already talked about the number of dogs that are needed versus the number you find in shelters and rescues alone.

They will never line up. Right? They're just too far off from one another. But the problem is also that people want what they want, and they're not necessarily going to, even if you tell them, get a dog from a shelter. Especially if what they want is a dog whose background they know from start to finish, or if what they want is a particular kind of dog.



Shelters have tried to find ways to circumvent the issue, including moving dogs from one part of the world to another. When you look at it across the board, far too often, it's not that there are not enough dogs – there are not enough that match what people want.

Q2: *What are recommendations for breeding ages? I know what my breeder friends' recommendations are, so I was wondering what yours were, for when dogs start and end the breeding program.*

Dr. Croney: Because the breeds are different and maturity of the dogs is going to be different according to the breed, which corresponds with weight and all kinds of other things, our standards only allow dogs to begin breeding when they are physically mature, and when the attending veterinarian approves it. Our program is written so that the attending veterinarian has to be a partner as well, and oversees the decision making..... they're involved every step along the way in the decisions that breeders are executing.

So breeding starts when the dogs are physically mature and in good condition as assessed by their veterinarian.... And this comes from the science that is available - it's not our science.

In terms of looking at data -- when dogs start to have more and more problems relative to pregnancies (either getting them, retaining them, producing litters that are healthy, that are born alive, that stay alive, that kind of thing) -- all of those numbers start to convene around a particular number. It's about six years old. Interestingly, it's not just the case for the dams. The same sort of pattern starts to show up for the stud dogs as well. So in our standards, they have to be retired by the age of six. Now, the contentious point is how often dogs are bred.

We speak to that in our standards. Many people think it is wrong to breed on consecutive extra cycles. What science and reproductive physiologists tell us is if the dog is physically healthy, and in good body condition, it's fine to do that knowing that there's a public concern, an ethics concern, and a science or a health concern here.

We hedged our bets. We told the breeders. And this is where, again, outcome-based can be your friend, right? Law can't do this, but we can, because we're not law. You can either breed your dogs on consecutive estrus cycles or you can skip a cycle. So our rule is you get six litters or six years with your dogs.

The beauty of this is that if a breeder chooses to breed on consecutive cycles (they cannot breed unless their veterinarian says the dog is physically healthy and it is okay to do it), you end up with dogs that are being retired at far earlier ages, right? Which means the likelihood that they're going to look like a desirable potential candidate to go into a home.....is a bit higher.



So that's what we came up with. And again, we looked at the science to inform the start/stop. But the benefit [is] getting dogs out of kennels and into homes if they are good rehoming candidates. Our task for this year is to make sure we help our breeders do their best work on rehoming without adding to the shelter burden.

Julie Palais: Are you aware of any peer reviewed studies that have been done (or have you thought of doing one?), reporting on surveys by breeders to ask the general public (in different regions of the country; urban vs. rural areas) what breed of dog they would prefer if they had their choice?

Of course these things change with time (and depending on the most recent blockbuster movie with a dog in it) but it would be interesting to know if breeders have thought of doing surveys before breeding dogs to make sure there is a demand for the animals they are supplying.

Dr. Croney: I love this question. I don't know who spilled beans, but this is relevant to the work we've got planned for the very near future.... more to come there.

Q3: *Currently doing data research on online puppy sale sites, noticing breeders on puppies.com, especially in Michigan, are advertising as Good Dog Certified breeders. Very limited information on this certification and if it is even legitimate. Sounds great to the consumer. Can you comment on this versus your program?*

Dr. Croney:

I can't tell you anything about the certification. And part of the reason I can't is that before Good Dog was even Good Dog, the people who created it or had the idea about it, came to me and asked me to advise them. And because I had a conflict of interest, because we have our program, I couldn't advise them on standards.

What I could do is make sure that [they had] whatever science we had and the science that was relevant to what they needed to put together.... so that's what I did. I did that for a couple of years with them. I no longer serve in that role with them. So I can't, unfortunately, tell you anything about their certification program.

Q4: *Could you speak to your viewpoint about breeders actually meeting potential customers, instead of selling dogs to a third party site or shipping a couple states away?*

Dr. Croney: So, my short answer is, of course. I think everybody would say that's ideal.... I think there's oftentimes an assumption that if a breeder is not meeting with the person, it's because they have something to hide [and that is not always true]. I'm not going to say that couldn't be the case ever. In fact, I'm sure that is the case for some people.



For our breeders, we asked them to open their doors as much as possible, unless there's a real biosecurity or health risk that can't be managed. And again, in consultation with their vet, we asked [that] if anybody wants to come and see them (their kennels or their dogs and visit with them) that they do that. We do have many breeders that sell directly to the public.

So that is actually already happening. For some of them, part of the issue is based on where they live. Many of these [breeders] are in sort of remote....rural areas. And many of these folks are very, very shy. And their communities are... careful because they often have not had great experiences with people who want to come to them.

But what we see more and more is that people are willing to open up their doors and are potentially interested in meeting folks who want to know what's going on or who want to see for themselves. So I for sure would encourage that. And I think, yeah, it would be ideal if everyone could meet their breeder and meet their dog.

And I think encouraging people to ask for that is important. And to the degree that we can help facilitate that and help prepare breeders to do that kind of thing, of course we're willing to do that, but we also want to be careful and be respectful because everybody's not an extrovert. I can attest to that firsthand.

And some people have had bad experiences and are cautious....Or [because of] where they're located, it might not be feasible. But I think there is movement in that direction and I hope that helps.

Q4.2 *@So the question was more on the opposite end...about the breeders actually seeing where the dog was going to live....*

Dr. Croney: Yeah. So the same thing's going to happen, right? Especially when geographic separation makes it difficult for the breeder. Especially keep in mind that the Amish breeders...don't drive. So it would be very difficult for them to get to the person buying their dog in many instances or to see what's happening there. So again, we're trying to sort of work with people where they are at and find ways to facilitate that kind of contact and follow up.

Q5: *Could you envision a way that any of your standards could be incorporated into law without taking away the power of inspiration and innovation?*

Dr. Croney: ... If somebody is writing a law and they want feedback on whether what they are writing makes sense in the real world for this population of dogs (because there are some differences between other dog populations you might be more familiar with) and they want feedback or they want insight from the data that we have that lets them know [whether they] have they put things together in a way that makes sense and will actually have the intended welfare outcomes, we're always happy to



give them that sort of support. That's, again, the beauty of being in a land grant institution. Our goal is to give people the information and the tools they need to do their best work.

Would I give the standards to people who want to write laws? No. Because invariably what happens, and I tell you this from experience, not just with dogs, but with other species, is that you have lawyers who work really hard, (but who don't know that changing words and moving things around actually makes a difference) cherry picking parts and pieces of things that sound good to them. And then what you have is a hodgepodge, which is why I told you all it's not about the standards, it's about the people. Because if I gave you all of the standards right now as they are, threw it out to people and said, go have at it.....and if people did what I just told you, they still wouldn't get the outcomes that we get, because the thing works holistically. And part of the secret sauce is the relationship with the people that makes it work..... It's not the nitty gritty details of the standards themselves. But anyway, could we help? Absolutely.

Are we willing to give that kind of scientific support? Absolutely. So I hope people take advantage of that. We just ask that people be considerate of our time and bandwidth if they ask us to share our findings. We're happy to do it and to help, we publish in open access journals so that no one has to navigate a paywall to learn what we found. We also try to put together lay summaries on our website. But if people need more than that and we can provide further info, we will always do our best to do so and just ask people to be respectful of the demands on our time which have us consistently stretched impossibly thin

Q6: And I'm going to answer something really quickly because I can do it fast. I think this was from someone who asked the question before, and it's about follow up certification: breeders are certified annually. There's an audit every year.

Q7: *Could you tell us again who funded this research?*

Dr. Croney: Please see the CCC website for details of which funders sponsored which studies. The research (not the standards, but the specific research studies that we did that informed them) were funded by the World Pet Association, Pet Food Institute, Stanton Foundation, and Life of Riley at Spring Point. USDA APHIS funds our current research on puppy transport.

Q8: *Since they are more commercial breeders - are they following breed recommendations for health testing - OFA Hips etc, DNA genetic health testing? Is this part of the health pillar?*



Dr. Croney: All CCC breeders are asked to follow breed recommendations in these areas as advised by their attending veterinarians. In fact, we have also worked out arrangements with at least one major genetics company to make testing more affordable. I would be remiss in not pointing out that we should not assume that non-CCC breeders are not already doing some or all of this. Many are.

Q9: *What about writing a model animal welfare law/regulation that is written with the approach you recommend?*

Dr. Croney: I am not an attorney or lobbyist and so have not attempted anything of this kind. Also, as we are still testing and working out which approaches yield best outcomes for dogs through actions that are feasible logistically and financially for breeders, I would be wary of improperly inserting myself into such an effort, especially given the caveats I shared about law having to target minimum standard. I'm more interested in maximizing positive outcomes for dogs and the people who provide care for them and who care about them. That said, we go out of our way to publish our findings in different formats so they can be easily accessed and understood by those who are charged to craft laws because a robust evidence base is essential if laws are to have any chance of being relevant, effective or meaningful to dog welfare outcomes in the real world.