

WHAT REALLY IS A RESPONSIBLE RABBIT BREEDER?

You can find plenty of articles on the internet about what defines a “responsible breeder”, the problem is many of these are written by individuals or groups who are opposed to the very concept of breeding any animal for any purpose. So it would be like asking someone from the KKK to write about an African American issue, or asking a neo-nazi to do a piece about the Jewish faith. You’ll get something, the accuracy is just real questionable!

So first when reading articles think about who wrote them and if there is a why. Is it someone who supports animal rights (cessation of all use of animals), is it someone involved in “rescue” (most rabbit “rescuers” are rabidly opposed to breeding). If an article appears on a “rescue” site could the goal be to propagandize the reader to not buy from a breeder or pet store and instead purchase their pet from a “rescue” organization? Does the author have any experience as a breeder? If not how can they possibly understand the issues breeders must face.

Let’s review an article I’ve seen referenced titled “Good and Bad Rabbit Breeders” from the CO HRS. The article tries to “educate” buyers about breeders, the problem is it’s written by a group that is opposed to all breeding of rabbits. That is the first clue that all will not be right or accurate. After reading the article my thoughts are they set up all breeders to fail their various “tests” to determine good vs bad. The article even states “In our opinion, it is quite a risk to go to a breeder for a companion rabbit”. This organization also offers rabbits for purchase, yes they call it “adoption” but adoption is really no different than buying a pet.

The article starts with the faulty premise that all breeders contribute to “overpopulation”. I just love that word, a great marketing term to try and convince perspective pet owners to only buy from shelters and “rescue”. It also works for animal rights activists when they lobby to get laws passed that restrict and eliminate all breeders. Actually “overpopulation” doesn’t exist, what does exist is a lack of interest by many pet owners in purchasing an animal from a shelter or “rescue”. One could write a book detailing and proving the lack of an overpop crisis in any animal, please refer to other articles on the website concerning this issue. But what you do need to know right now is many shelters in the US are importing animals from other states and even foreign countries in order to fulfill pet owner demand for cute baby animals or smaller breeds. Meanwhile the large adult mixed breeds languish in the shelter or are killed because they aren’t as marketable. In rabbits the “rescue” community has never proven any overpop exists, they don’t even use numbers just use the word. And since people have been conditioned over many years to believe in an “overpopulation” of dogs and cats they just blindly accept it. If numbers are used when researched we have found their numbers are made up or inflated.

So how exactly is any breeder responsible for an overpopulation that doesn’t exist? Yes there are pet rabbit owners who for various reasons decide to get rid of their pet. That is NOT the fault of the breeder, good or bad. The only way a breeder would contribute to the mythical overpop is if they took their rabbit to a shelter or “rescue”. But since there is a good market for rabbit meat that isn’t happening.

Also the article inaccurately states a doe has an 80% probability of getting uterine cancer by age 5 unless spayed. They state this because they question is it “appropriate” to breed a rabbit for more than a year

or two before getting her spayed. Well they start on a faulty premise that probability is 80%, the available information just doesn't support that 80% figure. Even individuals in the "rescue" community are admitting the 80% can't be supported by the facts. So like the overpop myth asking if it's even a good idea to breed a doe based on a mythical chance of getting cancer makes little sense logically. The reality is rabbits are prey animals and therefore are biologically programmed to reproduce frequently. Many does can easily reproduce well into their 5th year. Rabbits are also induced ovulators which means the act of mating releases eggs so they can be bred year round and again frequently. Also they are able to reabsorb litters so if the doe is not in good health, eating enough, etc they will abort the litter.

Why Do Breeders Breed?

The next section offers their take on why people breed rabbits. Unfortunately they throw in people who really aren't breeders, pet owners who have an accidental breeding. Technically the word breeder can be defined as anyone allowing two animals to breed, but that's not real accurate when discussing people who breed in an organized manner. They also simplify why breeders breed with things like "ego strokes". Almost seems like a negative thing doesn't it? Well how many people do things because it makes them feel good about themselves? Breeding show animals is not easy, probably the hardest goal in breeding. There are many factors that go into why someone chooses to breed show animals, basically it's something a show breeder has a passion for. It can include the enjoyment of being around others who enjoy the same hobby, challenging yourself to learn more and be able to put that knowledge to work, or simply working with the animals. It's hard to put into words, again those who do just seem to have a passion for it. But if you want to talk about ego strokes, how many "rescuers" out there wear what they do on their sleeve and crave the praise people give them just because they "rescue". Ego isn't confined to just one group, and it really isn't a bad thing.

Of course the article also throws in another propaganda tool, stating that for every rabbit brought into the world another dies. This was started by the mainstream animal rightists and was originally about dogs. All other species specific animal rightists just plug their animal of choice into it. It's just propaganda and isn't at all true.

Factors to Determine a "Good" Breeder

Then we have the list of what makes a breeder good or bad. These specific points are what sets up all breeders to fail their little "test" and it isn't fair. Let's go through them and explain:

- 'Spays/neuter all rabbits sold as pets'. In theory it'd be nice to do this however you ever ask a vet how much they charge for these surgeries? I'm sorry but there just isn't any money in breeding show rabbits. And pet rabbits aren't so easy to sell. In order to qualify on this point a breeder would have to be rich. Most show breeders aren't even breaking even each year let alone operating in the black enough to come up with probably thousands of dollars to s/n pets. If a pet owner wants their rabbit s/n they can handle that expense. To expect a breeder to do this is just ridiculous. Also consider that most of these "rescues" are not for profits that don't pay taxes and can beg for donations from the public, not to mention the generous discounts they receive from vets to s/n.

- Sells pets to people who have completely set-up what “rescue” defines as appropriate environment and ensures it via inspection. Cute, like anybody has time in their lives to go inspect pet owner’s houses. Would you the pet owner want some stranger to enter your house to ensure you’re “good” enough to own a pet? Most breeders give out information regarding what pet owners need to do for the rabbit, we trust the pet owner will listen. Personally between the price of gas (most of my pet buyers travel an hour or more each way) and the time it takes to properly care for my own rabbits, plus add in care of my family, and activities outside of rabbits, I just wouldn’t have the resources to inspect everyone who buys a pet rabbit. Oh and they mean a rabbit is to be kept inside the house period end of story, they hate people who keep rabbits outdoors or even in an area like a garage or porch that affords some indoor protection but reduces mess in a living area. And yes rabbits can be messy, keeping them in your living room is not an option for everybody. So that is suppose to make someone a “bad” owner.
- The pre-screening process. Oh my gosh they certainly go above and beyond reasonable screening, not pets for young children-even though there are many young kids out there who can take proper care of a rabbit, smokers need not apply, they want you to verify a rabbit vet has been contracted, swear to keep the rabbit no matter what life throws at you AND the perspective buyer must predict what may happen in their future to cause problems keeping said rabbit. Yeah whatever, I think it’s enough to educate people about the downside to rabbit ownership and let them decide. You know most people have half a brain and don’t need to be interrogated or treated as if they couldn’t possibly be a good pet owner. Most breeders treat pet buyers with respect and dignity, we don’t treat them like a criminal.
- Number 6 they want you to caution pet owners away from young rabbits and to adults. Funny thing is most of the rabbits in shelters or “rescue” are adults not babies. Hmmmm..... Anyway it’s a given that not every baby rabbit produced by a breeder is going to make a good addition to the breeding program, so if we know when they are babies we don’t need them and someone wants a baby as a pet, why should we push for that person to buy an adult instead. Don’t get me wrong, adults make fine pets as well and breeders usually have some adults available for sale at any given time. The fact is most pet owners want a baby, I have noticed in recent years the majority won’t even consider an adult or even a junior who is 3 months or older.
- “Takes back any rabbits sold”. Sounds nice but, given constraints on space and other resources it is unfair to expect a breeder to take back rabbits that were sold. The buyer is responsible for the animal, if you can’t keep it YOU need to take responsibility and rehome the animal. I don’t think there are a lot of pet owners who went to a breeder getting rid of their rabbits. Research shows most breeders offer education and written materials. Since it’s harder to find a breeder than a pet store or “rescue” most going to a breeder are pretty good candidates to start with and are responsible.
- Numbers 8 and 9 are good to, “Contributes to trying to stop pet store selling of rabbits” and includes “rescue of non-purebred rabbits in their activities”. Nice, ban pet stores, what right do any of us have to try and put someone out of business who runs a pet store? There are good pet stores out there, I certainly won’t work to get rid of pet store sales. And heck, you argue to close down a pet store by what logic are any breeders exempt? Or “rescue” for that matter. We ban

pet stores it will make it harder for pet owners to obtain pets, but then again that is exactly what “rescue” wants.

And then we have the requirement to “rescue” and not just your breed but specifically non-purebreds. Why? If they want to mandate breeders “rescue” mutts obviously they have a problem with too many mixed breed rabbits which more than likely came about via irresponsible pet owners. Realistically, if a breeder wanted to be a rabbit “rescuer” then they would be doing that instead of breeding. It’s hard enough to find pet homes for rabbits I produce, “rescuing” mutts isn’t going to be possible. Like I said, a set-up for failure with these definitions of a “good” breeder. They just want to disqualify all breeders from being responsible, and they probably figure if any do try and abide by their nonsense they could get some help finding homes for mutts.

- 11-13 pretty much deal with the nuts and bolts of breeding, they want more emphasis put on breeding for health and temperament than on physical characteristics, breed does capable of breeding easily and safely, and something about breeding only physical traits that benefit a rabbit. The last part they don’t state specifics but do say this one “automatically” disqualifies some breeders-also not stating which specific breeds. This section clearly demonstrates the lack of knowledge about rabbit breeders “rescue” has. First off why would we want to breed a doe that can’t produce babies easily or safely? And you know what sometimes when breeding you have to give them a chance to produce a successful litter. As far as breeding for health and temperament, again a nasty sickly animal is not going to be much help to a show breeder. I really don’t think they get the balance in breeding animals for physical traits while getting that good health and temperament thing.

Not knowing what specific breeds they consider are an automatic disqualification to be a good breeder I can’t specifically comment. However I would say in the rabbit world we have and continue to maintain breeds that are viable and viable naturally. I know I’ve read things about various dog breeds that due to selectively breeding for specific traits the breed now has problems reproducing naturally. If one reads the ARBA Standard of Perfection and looks at how the standard is changed I think you will agree that we are much more careful about the physical traits in our breeds than perhaps other animal species have been. Since “rescue” is notorious for hating purebred animals I would guess they just want us to move away from breeding specific breeds and just get down to a generic looking rabbit. Probably only in one color since they get upset if perspective pet owners show a preference for colors.

- 14 and 15 deals with keeping rabbits forever if you can’t find that home with the gold plated feed dish. The reality is most pet owners go to pet stores for a rabbit. A growing number now go to shelters and “rescue”. Breeders are left with very few people coming to them. We can’t sit around developing “waiting” lists that people aren’t serious about waiting before we breed our animals. Because rabbits are both a food source and pet

there is always a market for those who don't go as pets. In addition as stated earlier most pet owners won't even consider an adult as a pet, so obeying this requirement means a breeder will have far more rabbits than they can properly care for and little hope of re-homing them. Not a smart move.

- Provides medical care for any and all ailments and are not allowed to euthanize. They even state "no matter how contagious". Unlike "rescue" breeders do not receive discounts from vets or public donations that are tax exempt. So when a rabbit becomes ill one must make hard choices, and especially if the ailment is contagious. See what I mean about a set-up to fail. I'm sorry but the needs of the herd outweigh the needs of the one. In general rabbit breeders are very knowledgeable about rabbit health and can easily treat most problems themselves. There are some problems that while a pet owner may be able to put the time and resources into treating their single sick rabbit a breeder can't and must make a tough decision. I'm sure most would agree with that line of thinking, first and foremost the principle is not let any rabbit suffer.
- Then they want breeders to use "every bit of their influence" to kick "bad" breeders out of ARBA. Okay because the ARBA is a police organization and we have the resources to investigate every breeder right....wrong. ARBA is a volunteer organization that while it promotes rabbits the main activity is oversee the system of judging rabbits and registering rabbits. There just aren't resources there to ensure every breeder is a good breeder. That's why we have law enforcement, a violation of animal cruelty laws is handled by the law, not by animal organizations. And nobody wants to see any bad breeders out there, of course using the "rescue" definition of a "bad breeder" I guess there wouldn't be any ARBA or rabbit breeders because their standards are ridiculous to follow. But forgetting about "rescue" standards for a moment the vast majority of breeders are good, and people do what they can to get rid of the bad apples but it isn't easy.

And what is the rescue industry doing about ridding their ranks of bad "rescues aka hoarders?"

- The last point is being cautious about exposing rabbits to "deadly" diseases at shows. Not really sure what they mean here, or how one is suppose to accomplish that. I'm going to assume they may be referring to VHD, which is contagious, deadly, and we can't do a darn thing about. It's a complicated issue since it's been declared a foreign animal disease by the USDA. So you know the reality is every time you take a rabbit out of the house or even go into your rabbitry you are risking exposure to some disease. Breeders do what they can but some things, like VHD there really isn't anything we can do about it. Heck our government doesn't care because they still allow imports of rabbit meat and fur from countries with a VHD problem. I'm almost thinking this last clause is suppose to be defined as breeders won't attend shows because there may be a risk, remote risk to be honest but still life's a risk. So how does one be a show breeder and not attend any shows? Set up for failure.

Now let's look at the article Breeders and Pet Stores by Kathy Smith 2004. She begins with stating she would "prefer **everyone** adopt from a shelter, rescue group, or individual rather than purchase a rabbit from a breeder or pet store." Well, at least she lets you see the bias right off. Her article includes "questions" to ask and of course her version of what the right answer should be. She states if the breeder uses cedar or pine shavings you must "beware" and then incorrectly says these shavings cause respiratory and liver problems. If you have not already please read the pine shavings article on this website to learn that softwood shavings are safe to use.

Then she wants you to ask the breeder if they linebreed aka inbreed. And the answer must be "no". The answer she wants is not correct or accurate. Linebreeding is a tool that when used properly produces healthy animals. Most rabbit breeders do some amount of linebreeding and do not produce animals with health problems or physical deformities.

She also wants the buyer to ask what the culling policy is. Her beef is that breeders will put down rabbits with physical abnormalities and health problems. Doing so is actually a very responsible action. However Smith seems to want the breeder to offer rabbits as pets who have serious issues such as malocclusion. "Many also cull those with treatable problems like malocclusion or those who are weakest." I guess what you have to ask is breeder really responsible if they offer rabbits who need their teeth trimmed every other week or are unhealthy? A breeder doing this may also end up violating animal laws in their state. Smith also suggests buyers **ask** for a rabbit with malocclusion. I have to ask, is it typical for a rescue or shelter to sell rabbits with health problems and malocclusion? As far as treating it because a rabbit's teeth continually grow you either have to clip constantly which can lead to complications or have the teeth surgically removed, leading to great vet expense.

It seems pretty obvious that if you want to find a good breeder the last thing you want to do is get advice from "rescue".

The following was written by rabbit breeders and provides an accurate assessment of what is a responsible breeder.

The Rabbit Education Society Standard For Responsible Breeding

Anyone breeding rabbits must recognize the need for responsibility towards the animals.

A Responsible Rabbit Breeder:

-Will not contribute to the abandoned rabbit problem by abandoning rabbits in the wild. Breeders may have a "Take Back" policy for every rabbit you sell, whether for show, breeding, or as a pet. However it is **not** a requirement because pet owners need to accept responsibility for the animals they purchase as pets. If "rescue" groups, individuals, or even animal shelters actively solicit or advertise for unwanted rabbits to sell to the public it is not considered irresponsible to give them rabbits. Rabbit "rescuers" as well "rescuers" of other species have been known to purchase rabbits at auctions. This is **not** "rescue" nor should they falsely advertise these rabbits as "abandoned" by breeders.

-Will not over breed rabbits. Overbreeding is defined as producing more animals than responsible outlets for culls can be found. Suitable outlets for culls include: pets, show/breeding stock, consumption by humans or other animals, lab use, & fur.

-Will put the health and welfare of their animals first. Health problems will be treated as soon as possible and treatment includes euthanasia. Rabbits will not be allowed to suffer. However a responsible breeder is not expected to put a lot of time or money into treating health problems. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one. For most health problems there is either an easy cure or you can never cure it. Health problems such as snuffles that can't be cured places the entire herd at risk and euthanasia is often the most responsible choice.

-Good husbandry practices as accepted by the American Rabbit Breeders Association and/or the Rabbit Education Society will be followed.

-Euthanasia will be done using a humane method as recommended by the ARBA, RES, or other rabbit breeding organization.

-Only sells rabbits that are properly weaned and not too young to leave the rabbitry.

-If a breeder sells to a pet store they will only deliver healthy rabbits who have been properly weaned and are not underage. They will also provide the pet store with written care instructions to be passed on to the new owner. Since rabbit "rescue" has pushed large chain pet stores to cease selling rabbits from breeders and only offer rabbits for sale from "rescues" it is illogical to say breeders aren't responsible if they sell to a pet store.

-They will deal with reputable and responsible pet stores who sell healthy, properly sexed and aged rabbits and provide written instructions to the pet owner.

-Will Breed to ensure genetic abnormalities are not perpetuated, that healthy rabbits conforming to the American Rabbit Breeders Assoc. breed standard are produced.

-Will educate every rabbit buyer and provide written care instructions

-Will be honest and reputable