

This House believes keeping animals as pets should be banned

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Introduction

Before coming up with the arguments for your case, take the time to do a fair bit of research. Reading articles about the resolution will give you an idea about what kind of action to take. You may find that some things are already in place, while other ideas have no information on them because they are not popular topics for the media. It is important to focus on concepts that you can support with research. So above all, before you do anything, gain a good knowledge base.

This resolution is a great one to start the year with: *“This House believes that keeping animals as pets should be banned.”* A resolution like this is open to a lot of different interpretations. It is necessary to define “pets”, “keeping”, and “banned” very clearly and consistently with the Affirmative case you want to run.

Try looking at some of the big themes of the debate: is this a legal vs. a social issue? Can you argue nature vs. nurture? Are we treating animals inhumanely? Why do policies seem to work hard on ensuring the rights of people, but seem to turn a blind eye on the abuses of other living things? What rights do pets have? Look for the contradictions. Where does animal cruelty fall under criminal statutes? These are just a few ideas to get you started. Try brainstorming more ideas with your partner and your club, then focus on what case you want to build – on both the affirmative and negative side.

The key to running a good affirmative argument in this debate is to remain focused. The more focused you are on what you want your plan to achieve, the harder it is for the negative team to attack you. Although it might seem easy to take every argument you can think of and build them into one case, keep in mind that this gives a lot of room to the negative team when deciding what they are going to argue against. They might be able to zero in on your weakest point and convince the judges that you should lose just because of that one point! You don’t want that to happen, so pick a focused direction.

Your plan could be to fine bad pet owners, or jail them, or send them to classes. All of these cases have good arguments behind them and good evidence to support them (but there may be other approaches that you should also explore – this is your chance to solve this problem!). It would be hard to argue all the possible points in the little time you have. When developing your plan, be prepared for possible negative attacks and then strengthen your case. Don’t leave yourself open to attack!

It is beneficial to remember the same things as the negative team. You don’t know what the affirmative team will do, so you should do a lot of research and become very knowledgeable about this subject. That way, you will be ready to deal with anything the affirmative comes up with. It might help to write down many pieces of evidence on different cards, but only plan on using a few of them, depending on how the affirmative team defines the debate. Remember, preparation is just as important, if not more important, for the negative team as it is for the affirmative team. You must have prepared evidence too!

Of course, there are a few negative points you can prepare before hand that might work against any case, although these more general and less-focused arguments will not be quite as effective. You might plan on giving a few examples of the health benefits of pet ownership. Maybe the affirmative did not make a clear link between cause and effect, so point that out. Create a strong negative case that takes an alternate but equally valid view of the problem.

Try summing up the main theme of your case in one clear statement – either for the affirmative or negative. Then, make sure you have 3 to 5 key points in your case that relate back to your theme or “caseline”. During the debate, make sure both your constructive arguments and your clash relate back to your caseline and attack the opposite team’s caseline.

To win a debate, you must show the judges that you triumphed over your opponents on some key arguments and that you presented the stronger case. The evidence you collect when researching is very helpful for illustrating that. If you have done a good job as the affirmative team mentioning evidence for every point you make, and the negative team has argued against you but has failed to support themselves with articles and statistics, then show the judges that you have a more concrete case. Mentioning your superior evidence should tip the balance of the debate in your favor if both teams have done a good job of clashing. In your final rebuttal speeches, in addition to your final clash and summary, refer back to the big theme of your case and how it was proven superior to your opposition’s development of their theme.

Lastly, remember that this research package is just a starter. Since there are so many roads you can take for this resolution, there are a variety of articles with examples of each. However, since you will probably focus in on one topic, this package won’t have enough on each individual topic. So go to the library! Interview people! Watch the news! Surf the web! The best debater is one that knows the topic inside and out.

~ Adapted from an article written by Garrett Richards, Fall 2004

Understanding definitions:

When you get a resolution, you pick out two types of key words to understand:

1. Terms specific to the topic that everyone needs to agree on to debate, like **'pets'**. You define this in the first affirmative speech.
2. Words that require a specific type of argument from debaters, like **'banned'**. You define your stance on this using your caseline and arguments.

Understanding the burdens:

In a debate 'should' means that there is a moral and practical reason to make the specified change.

Affirmative:

The side that agrees with the resolution must prove the current system is in need of change. To meet your burden, prove:

- There is a moral or practical reason for the banning of pets

OR

- It is wrong to keep pets

You also need to prove that:

- This House has an obligation to ensure the welfare of animals

Negative

The side that disagrees with the resolution must prove that the current system is good enough. This can be done in **one** of several ways:

- Prove the current system is fine

OR

- Prove the problems identified by the affirmative are caused by something other than the pets themselves

OR

- Prove that there are some minor exceptions but overwhelmingly there is not reason to ban pets.

The Big Debate:

Each debate topic has an underlying disagreement about what way society should do something. In this case, the argument is, if it is morally or socially acceptable for people to keep pets?

Position 1 –Pet ownership causes more harm than good to society and also to the pets

Position 2 – The mental and physical advantages to owning a pet outweigh the negatives.

Specific Vocabulary used to show these positions:

1. **Domestic Animal** – This is an animal that depends on humans to live. They need people to supply them with food, shelter and water. Cats and dogs are good examples of domestic animals, and so are horses, cows and chickens
2. **Ownership**- To be the owner of an animal is to say that it is your property. This definition treats animals like objects rather than living things.
3. **Guardianship**- To be the guardian of an animal is to accept the responsibility of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of another living creature.
4. **Passive Cruelty** – This occurs when an animal is neglected. Starvation, dehydration, inadequate shelter in extreme weather conditions, and failure to seek veterinary care when an animal needs medical attention are all examples of passive cruelty.
5. **Active Cruelty** – This occurs when a person intentionally harms an animal. This can range anywhere from beating an animal to an animals' death. This type of abuse is often a sign of severe psychological problems in the abuser.
6. **Anthropomorphic** – This is a term than means to give human qualities such as emotion or motivations to an inhuman thing, such as a pet. An example of anthropomorphism is to say that your pet is angry. Pets don't have emotions like humans do, so attributing a human emotion to an animal is to give a human quality to an inhuman being.
7. **Humane** – This is the act of showing compassion and kindness to another living creature. (Opposite of cruel)

Background Information

<http://www.mspca.org/programs/cruelty-prevention/animal-cruelty-information/>

What is Animal Cruelty?

MSPCA Angell | 2009

Ask a group of animal protectionists if hunting, trapping, calf roping, steer wrestling and a long list of other animal-use activities are cruel and you will probably get a resounding "yes." Ask the same questions of those who participate in these activities and you will likely get a resounding "no." Everyone sees things from the perspective of their own concerns and interests. And many kinds of people have an interest in animals.

This dilemma has existed since the very beginning of the animal-protection movement. While much progress has been made for animals in our society, particularly during the past 50 years, the continuing absence of a widely accepted definition of cruelty to animals remains an enormous obstacle. Every activity that threatens the well being of animals - and that has not already been remedied through legislation - must be challenged and overcome on a largely individual basis. One definition, sometimes used by judiciary authorities, the MSPCA and other humane law enforcement officials, is found in Blacks Law Dictionary:

Cruelty to Animals. The infliction of physical pain, suffering or death upon an animal, when not necessary for purposes of training or discipline or (in the case of death) to procure food or to release the animal from incurable suffering, but done wantonly, for mere sport, for the indulgence of a cruel and vindictive temper, or with reckless indifference to its pain.

The single greatest obstacle to drafting, interpreting and more effectively enforcing animal-protection laws is the premise on which they are based. Constitutionally designed to protect people from acts that are considered offensive to human morality, these laws do not always consider animals' true biological and social needs. Nowhere is this more evident than in humane law enforcement. Each day in the MSPCA's Law Enforcement Department brings calls from people concerned about activities that they consider cruel but that may not violate any law. One of the most common, and sometimes heart-wrenching, of such calls concerns the dog chained to a doghouse 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. The dog is fed and watered adequately and is in good physical condition; but its only contact with another living creature occurs when its owner sees to its basic physical needs. The dog - like most dogs - apparently craves companionship, as it often cries incessantly. But it lives in near-total social isolation.

Does this sound like a cruel situation? To the MSPCA it certainly does. Does it violate any animal-protection laws? No, it does not. Technically and legally, there is nothing the MSPCA can do to compel a change in this situation.

Other common cruel but legal practices include dogs kept perpetually tethered on short chains, unable to properly exercise; dogs and cats confined to dark basements but otherwise properly cared for; and highly social elephants and other wild animals living solitary, stress-laden, and unnatural lives in zoos.

Regrettably, laws that protect people's sensibilities rather than animals' social and biological needs often fail to recognize the plight of these and other suffering creatures. Not until laws protect animals for their own sake will debates and disagreements over what constitutes cruelty be resolved - and humane law enforcement be able to intervene more effectively on behalf of all suffering animals.

In the meantime, we strive to interpret and enforce the laws that do exist, and to educate people about animals' needs in cases where the law does not provide adequate protection. We also work to educate the public, since this is the best way to change expectations and sensibilities and, ultimately, to create more comprehensive animal-protection laws.

<http://bigthink.com/ideas/39770>

Are pets good for you? Maybe. But then again, maybe not.

Big Think | August 18, 2011

Pet owners are a unique breed. Even those that hadn't wanted a pet often find themselves enthralled once they join the ranks of proud possessors of a furry (or not so furry; we don't discriminate) companion. Witness Adam Gopnik's recent tale of dog-ownership in the *New Yorker*. And that's all well and good; pets can make people happy.

But then, enter the actual health claims: People with pets live longer. They have lower blood pressure. They sleep better. They are more physically fit. They have less stress. Higher self-esteem. Greater life satisfaction. It's the so-called pet effect. Doesn't that sound like we should all run out and get ourselves a pet?

Just as much evidence shows that pets aren't all that good for you after all

Not so fast. Harold Herzog's recent analysis of studies from the past thirty years comes to a surprising conclusion: the pet effect is nothing more than an unsubstantiated hypothesis. For every study that shows some value of pet ownership, there are several that show absolutely no benefit at all – and in some cases, even negative effects. Only, those studies don't get any media coverage. It's tough to applaud negative or null findings.

Consider this. A 2001 study showed that subjects who had been put in a pet group showed lower increases in blood pressure under stress six months later. But, a 1997 study found that doing something stressful in the presence of a dog had no effect on blood pressure, while a 2007 study of 1,179 older adults found no differences in blood pressure between pet and non-pet owners. In 1980, a study of 92 heart attack victims showed that 28% of those with a pet survived for at least a year after, while only 6% of non-pet owners did. But, a 2010 study of 425 heart attack victims found that pet owners were actually *more*, not less, likely than non-pet owners to die or suffer remissions within a year of heart attack, at a rate of 22%, as compared to 14% of non-owners.

Even happiness self-reports have come into question: in 2010, 3,000 Americans were surveyed about their happiness; non-pet owners were just as likely as pet owners to report being very happy (note: this says nothing about pets *not* making you happy; only that owning a pet doesn't necessarily make you any happier than not owning one). And a 2011 study of dog owners found that those who were more attached to their pet were actually more depressed than those who were not. Meanwhile, over in England, people who had acquired pets were just as lonely six months later as they had been before the purchase; in Sweden, in a sample of 40,000 individuals, pet-owners suffered from greater psychological problems, such as anxiety, chronic tiredness,

depression, and insomnia; in Finland, out of 21,000 adults, pet owners were at a higher risk of hypertension, ulcers, migraines, high cholesterol, depression, and panic attacks; and in Australia, out of 2,551 older adults, those who owned dogs were in poorer physical health and more likely to be depressed.

So what does that mean – and why does it matter?

None of this means that pets are bad for you. That's not the point. The studies are pure correlation. Nothing whatsoever implies causation. But: it does mean that you can't draw the opposite conclusion either. You can't believe the studies that are also purely co relational that show the benefits of pet ownership, even if they make more sense to you. Either side has an equal shot at being right; and for now, the evidence is ambivalent at best.

Instead, be skeptical. It's only natural to seek confirmation of what we already believe. It's called the confirmation bias, and it plays into almost any decision we make. It's something that we always need to take into consideration – even if it means that even the most “common sense” and “logical” thing in the world should be questioned. It's not common sense and logical to everyone. Let me add a full disclosure here. I've owned a pet twice in my life: a goldfish that I named Blow-eyes—because she (or at least in my mind, it was a she) had puffy eyes—and flushed down the toilet when one morning, I found her floating belly-up in the tank; and a guinea pig that I named Guinea—because, well, I was a very creative child—and returned to the pet store a mere six months after I got him, when he bit my finger (that, and I never much cared for smells or litter or any of the trimmings that came along with my little pet). So I, too, am biased. I very much doubt I'd be writing this article if I owned a pet – but then again, it shouldn't matter, should it, in the service of impartial science?

Pets might very well be good for you. But then again, they are just as likely not to be. That doesn't mean your pet is not beneficial. That doesn't mean he doesn't make you happy. But does he have to add years to your life, take away pounds from your waistline, relieve stress, and improve your sleep as well? Or can he just make you happy because you like having a pet? There's nothing at all wrong with the second alternative.

Negative

<http://advocacy.britannica.com/blog/advocacy/2007/01/service-animals-help-humans-live-fuller-lives/>

Service animals help humans lead fuller lives

Encyclopedia Britannica Advocacy for Animals | January 22, 2007

The partnership between humans and animals dates back to the first domestication of animals in the Stone Age, as long as 9,000 years ago. But never have animals provided such dedicated and particular help to humans as they do today in the form of trained service, or assistance, to people with disabilities. These animals, usually dogs, help people accomplish tasks that would otherwise be prohibitively difficult or simply impossible. Service animals are not pets but working animals doing a job; thus, legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) in the United States and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) in the United Kingdom makes service animals exempt from rules that prohibit animals from public places and businesses.

The most familiar service animals are guide dogs who help visually impaired people move about safely. Systematic training of guide dogs originated in Germany during World War I to aid blinded veterans. In the late 1920s Dorothy Harrison Eustis, an American dog trainer living in Switzerland, heard of the program and wrote a magazine article about it. The publicity led her to her first student, Morris Frank, with whose help she established a similar training school in the United States in 1929, the Seeing Eye (now located in New Jersey).

Guide dog puppies are often bred for the purpose by the various organizations that train dogs. German shepherds, Labrador retrievers, and Labrador-golden retriever crosses are the most widely used breeds because of their calm temperaments, intelligence, natural desire to be helpful, and good constitutions. Puppies spend their first year with foster families who socialize them and prepare them for later training by teaching them basic obedience skills. At the age of approximately 18 months, guide dogs enter formal training, which lasts from about three to five months. During this period the dogs learn to adjust to a harness, stop at curbs, gauge the human partners height when traveling in low or obstructed places, and disobey a command when obedience will endanger the person.

In recent years, hearing dogs have become increasingly common. These dogs, usually mixed-breed rescues from animal shelters, are trained to alert their human partners to ordinary sounds such as an alarm clock, a baby's cry, or a telephone. The dogs raise the alert by touching the partner with a paw and then leading him or her to the source of the sound. They are also trained to recognize danger signals such as fire alarms and sounds of intruders again, by touching with a

paw and then lying down in a special alert posture, at which time the human partner can take appropriate action.

Dogs can be trained for a great variety of assistance purposes. For example, Great Plains Assistance Dogs Foundation trains several categories of assistance animals, including service dogs, who help people who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices; hearing dogs; seizure-alert or -response dogs, who help persons with seizure disorders by activating an electronic alert system when symptoms occur (some can even predict the onset of a seizure); and therapeutic companion dogs, who provide emotional support for people in hospices, hospitals, and other situations in which loneliness and lack of stimulation are continual problems. There are many programs that train and certify pet animals, especially dogs and cats, as therapy animals who visit such institutions and bring much-welcomed companionship to patients.

Animals are also used in programs such as animal-assisted therapy (AAT). In the words of the Delta Society, AAT is a goal-directed intervention that utilizes the motivating and rewarding presence of animals, facilitated by trained human professionals, to help patients make cognitive and physical improvements. For example, an elderly patient in a nursing home might be given the task of buckling a dog's collar or feeding small treats to a cat, activities that enhance fine motor skills. Goals are set for the patients, and their progress is measured.

Dogs and cats are not the only animals who can assist humans with disabilities. Capuchin monkeys are small, quick, and intelligent and can help people who are paralyzed or have other severe impairments to their mobility, such as multiple sclerosis. These monkeys perform essential tasks such as turning on lights and picking up dropped objects. One of the more unusual assistance animals is the guide horse. An experimental program in the United States trains miniature horses to guide the visually impaired in the same way that guide dogs do. The tiny horses may be an alternative for people who are allergic to dogs or who have equestrian backgrounds and are more comfortable with horses.

Certain dogs and other animals have special skills similar to those of the seizure-assistance dogs, such as the ability to detect a diabetic's drop in blood sugar and alert the person before danger occurs. The sometimes uncanny natural abilities of animals can benefit humans in many ways. Reputable organizations that train assistance animals also take steps to ensure that the animals are cherished and lead rewarding, enjoyable, and healthy lives. When the animals' helping careers are over, provision is made for their well-deserved retirement.

RX: Rex: From getting you out for a walk to comforting you when you're down, pets are good for your health (2002, June 20). Calgary Herald, C.1. Retrieved September 16, 2011, from Canada Newsstand Major Dailies (Document ID: 244974576)

When my boyfriend dumped me in Grade 11, I remember sobbing despondently into Fluffy Sue's white-and-grey fur. My cat had never had a girlfriend, but somehow he understood my despair and made me feel loved during my teenage breakup crisis.

It's no mystery that animals like cats and dogs are good for our emotional health and well being because they love us no matter what, even if we don't have a date on Friday night. What's not so well known is that pets benefit us both physiologically and psychologically -- beyond making us feel loved and wanted.

"There are all kinds of benefits," enthuses Robert Church, of Petland Superstores and co-host of the Global TV show The Pet Guys.

"Pets fill a bigger and bigger role in the family all the time."

He's seen first hand the way pets provide companionship to singles, motivate seniors to stay active as they age and help solidify families.

A single adult himself, Church has two birds, a tank of fish and two roving felines that "command" him to clean their litter box. He doesn't own any canines, but is aware of the "walk puppy, meet date" connection. "If you've got a dog and you're out walking your dog you're going to meet more people -- I've borrowed dogs," Church jokes, raising his eyebrows slightly.

"The other thing, too, is when you come home, even with a cat, or a bird, or a hamster, or whatever -- you come home and an animal's there and -- it's something to come home to."

No, they don't pay the bills or cook dinner during your absence, but they are always happy to see you, even if you haven't bathed for a week. This loyal companionship, combined with the capacity to give unconditional love and an uncanny ability to relate to your moods, make them reliable emotional pillars. These qualities also endear them to seniors, who often battle feelings of solitude as they age.

"(A pet) can be the one thing, the one most important thing in their whole life -- an animal that returns affection," Church explains. "Because what's the worst things that affect seniors?"

Loneliness and isolation. So if they have a dog or a cat, it responds and provides affection and attention. It also keeps them busier." If grandpa is out walking his Rottweiler, for example, he'll stay active and probably meet people, too.

Emotional well-being and the simple act of exercising Fido must have an impact, then, on physical health, because research has shown that seniors with pets visit the doctor less and cope better with stress.

In fact, pet owners in general are healthier physiologically than their pet-less counterparts. Studies have proven pet owners to have lower blood pressure as well as lower cholesterol levels than non-owners. Perhaps because of their dedication to and need of humans, pets help increase survival rates in owners who have suffered heart attacks.

Besides helping their pet parents recover from sicknesses, animals -- specifically dogs -- may also be able to uncover diseases before they become life threatening. There's growing evidence these pet detectives can be trained to sniff out skin cancers such as melanoma using their extraordinary olfactory sense, because cancerous tissues smell different from healthy ones.

A more immediate hazard to owners, particularly children, is allergies. Exposing kids to animals may help lower their risk of developing allergies.

"There's been some thought that by having pets in your household - - if you have young kids -- (the kids) may become desensitized to allergens," notes Carrie Miller, a doctor of veterinary medicine and an internal medicine resident. She explains the theory behind this claim: the more a toddler's immune system is exposed to pet dander, the better the youngster will be able to cope with such irritants.

In addition to helping prevent itchy eyes and runny noses in children, pet companions perhaps provide the most interesting psychological benefits to families with kids. Not only do animals such as cats and dogs bring a unique genuineness and unconditional love into a home -- Mom and Dad might get mad at each other, but the pet is always neutral -- most pets further kids' emotional development while teaching important life lessons.

"Children can learn to nurture through animals," confirms Sue McIntosh, a Calgary-based counsellor with a private practice in animal-assisted therapy. She says pet ownership especially helps boys learn nurturing skills because caring for a pet (as opposed to playing with a doll) is a gender-neutral activity. It also teaches responsibility.

"A kid's first pet might be a hamster and that might change his whole direction in life, because he's looking after something. There are so many life lessons you learn by being a sole caregiver of another animal. That includes (coping) when that animal dies."

Indeed, as sad as your child might be when Henry the hamster dies, it can be an important life lesson.

"It can be the first major loss in their life," McIntosh says.

She also notes that kids with pets usually have higher self-esteem, are more involved in extracurricular activities and display more empathy toward humans and animals. In fact, McIntosh is so convinced pets help heal the human psyche that she uses them in therapy sessions.

"Having them as co-counsellors makes me a better counsellor," McIntosh says, explaining that animals, unlike people, do not pass judgment on humans or their actions.

But wait. What about the puppy that gnaws your throw pillows or the kitty that claws your couch to tatters? Can't the actions of misbehaved mongrels and meowers send us into cardiac arrest instead of calming us down?

To prevent animals from having an adverse effect on our health, Church says it's important to consider everything that goes into ownership before taking the pet plunge, including training, time obligations and costs.

"If your dog is chewing everything up, barking all the time, it can have the opposite effect -- it can drive you nuts," agrees Church. "It's not the dog's fault. It's your fault -- for not learning how to train the dog." He explains that chewing is what dogs do, unless that behaviour is managed or modified.

"Cats are a little more incomprehensible sometimes. If your cat starts peeing in your laundry hamper, or on your bed, or on your pillow, or on your furniture -- is there a medical reason for that?" He says that while cats can be a bit vengeful, strange behaviour often has a medical explanation.

Overall, it's important to remember the perfect therapeutic animal doesn't just arrive gift-wrapped from the pet store -- you have to be a responsible pet owner and put in the effort to make the relationship work positively for everyone in the family.

Affirmative

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/nov/13/ethical-living-carbon-emissions>

Britain's problem with pets: they're bad for the planet.

The Guardian | November 13, 2009

Henrietta Morrison confidently plunges her spoon into a tin of slow-cooked lamb hotpot and lifts out a mouthful for inspection. She passes her nostrils over the meat chunks and accompanying sauce, smiles, then places the whole lot into her mouth. "Delicious," she remarks, as a small crowd of onlookers gathers round to watch the spectacle.

Someone eating their lunch doesn't usually elicit such attention, but, then again, most people aren't prepared to tuck into a tin of dog food for sustenance. Morrison has a point to prove, though: she is at Europe's largest pet trade show, PetIndex, at the Birmingham NEC, and her company, Lily's Kitchen, sells the most expensive pet food on the market. Her dog food, for example, retails in places such as Harrods for more than £2 a tin, with the promise that the contents are "proper food".

A quick inspection of the ingredients ("organic and certified holistic") shows why Morrison is prepared to put her pet food where her mouth is. Lamb ("60%"), rice, pearl barley, broccoli, spinach, blueberries, flaxseed, marigold petals, burdock root and alfalfa are just some of the ingredients contained within a tin of slow-cooked lamb hotpot. It really does look and sound good enough to eat – that's the whole point.

"I eat my pet food regularly to test batches," says Morrison. "My personal favourite is goose and duck feast with fruits, but chicken and turkey casserole is our bestseller."

Lily's Kitchen and its range of anthropomorphised pet "recipes" represent the somewhat rarefied summit of the UK's pet food industry, which is now said to be worth close to £2bn a year. Just like us humans, the nation's 8 million dogs and 8 million cats – as well as our collective menagerie of rabbits, horses, lizards, tropical fish et al – consume a wide variety of foodstuffs. In recent years, and despite the economic downturn, the pet food industry has witnessed a move towards "premium products", but the market is still dominated by products made with ingredients that, frankly, can send a shudder down any owner's spine. "Hydrolysed feather meal", "derivatives of vegetable origin", "ash" and "animal derivatives" are just some of the delights routinely found in pet food.

The industry has been the recipient of both jibes and brickbats about the true origin of its ingredients for decades. Horse meat, whale, kangaroo – before strict legislation tightened up the rules following the BSE scandal, we were used to hearing all sorts of hypotheses and rumours.

But now it faces a new source of criticism: just what is the environmental impact of feeding the huge quantity of "companion" animals around the world? A new book with the somewhat provocative title of *Time to Eat the Dog? The Real Guide to Sustainable Living* has triggered a highly charged debate about the environmental efficacy of our pet-owning habits. If we are to examine the environmental impacts of all our lifestyle choices, the book argues, then we must also include pets in the discussion, no matter how unsettling the answers. The various environmental impacts attributed to the human food chain are well documented, so isn't it right, for example, that we should now be questioning whether it is sensible to be feeding slow-cooked lamb hotpot to our dogs, too?

The *New Scientist*, in a recent editorial entitled "Cute, fluffy and horribly greedy", largely agreed with the book's findings that some pets, due to the food they eat, have a surprisingly high "ecological footprint" (a way of quantifying human demand on the planet's ecosystems using a measure called "global hectares"). "According to the authors . . . it takes 0.84 hectares [2.07 acres] of land to keep a medium-sized dog fed. In contrast, running a 4.6-litre Toyota Land Cruiser, including the energy required to construct the thing and drive it 10,000km a year, requires 0.41 hectares. Dogs are not the only environmental sinners. The eco-footprint of a cat equates to that of a Volkswagen Golf. If that's troubling, there is an even more shocking comparison. In 2004, the average citizen of Vietnam had an ecological footprint of 0.76 hectares. For an Ethiopian, it was just 0.67 hectares. In a world where scarce resources are already hogged by the rich, can we really justify keeping pets that take more than some people?"

Speaking from his university office in Christchurch, New Zealand, Robert Vale, who co-wrote the book with his partner Brenda Vale, admits that he has received a "few unpleasant emails" from irate pet owners since the *New Scientist* article was published, but insists that he still stands by his central point. "We need to know what we're doing when it comes to the environment," he says. "We can't go blind into this debate. Nothing should be off limits no matter how uncomfortable it is to discuss it. Human population growth is a huge issue, too. We have to recognise that we live in a world of finite resources."

Vale says he was "genuinely surprised" when calculating quite how large the environmental impact was of some of our most popular pet species. "Of all the areas we researched for the book, the subject of pets was by far the biggest surprise for us. But all we are arguing in the book is that we should be making sensible, informed choices. For example, it's not really going to be that much of a problem if you have a big dog but also take the bus everywhere, never fly and live in a small home. It's when everyone starts to have a big car, big house, big family and a big dog that the problems start."

Vale does not – as some of his critics seem to assume – advocate a mass cull of the world's pets. But some of his proposed solutions are still likely to shock some pet owners. For example, the

book suggests catching vermin such as rats and processing them into a "natural" cat food.

Equally, the book proposes a return to the days when families would – hence the book's title – have edible pets. For example, a pair of rabbits would be kept as pets and their offspring would be eaten. It's hard to see that one gaining much traction.

When feeding a pet, however, the advice is to "think feathers and long ears, not horns and fins". In other words, favour pet foods made from chicken and rabbit meat and avoid those containing red meat and fish which, by comparison, have a much higher environmental impact. Last and, perhaps, most obvious: the smaller the pet, the better.

Back among the avenues of stalls at the PetIndex show, vendors jostle for attention with their impressive and sometimes baffling range of pet foods and accessories. One woman proudly tells me why her pet food containing yucca extract makes "her dog's poo stink less".

Another tells me why, when you use her hair-grooming tool, you must aim to "never expose a dog's testicles". Two saleswomen from Shanghai try to explain to me the fashion vagaries of doggie handbags (let's be clear: that's handbags to carry around your dog, rather than handbags made from dogs). I also spot car seats for dogs, a "pet fountain" that allows your cat to drink from a constantly flowing source of water, and a "memory foam" mattress for "senior" pooches with bad backs. I even come across a treadmill for obese dogs – the "Fit Fur Life" with its attendant price tag of £1,865.

Amid this paradise of pet paraphernalia, I meet Ben Helm, the sales and marketing director of Golden Acres, the UK's largest manufacturer of own-brand pet foods. The company owns Lancashire's largest arable farm and its on-site factory produces 70,000 tonnes of pet food a year, exporting to 37 countries around the world. By most measures, it's a huge operation, but it's a doggie biscuit in scale compared with the four leading pet-food manufacturers – P&G, Nestlé, Mars and Colgate-Palmolive – which, between them, are thought to account for more than 80% of the world's pet-food market.

"Some people now spend more on feeding their pets than they do feeding their children," says Helm, with a hint of awe. "It's a huge industry. Our bestselling 'kibble' [dried composite biscuit] is lamb and rice. Until about a year ago, we were importing three shipping containers of lamb meal [the labelling term for dry rendered lamb derivative] from New Zealand every week to make our kibbles, but now we try to source more of it locally as people are worried about food miles." As for the rice, he says: "The pet-food industry is now probably the biggest single importer of rice in the country." (I later check this factoid with the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association. It says: "So far as we can tell, our industry uses 50,000-150,000 tonnes of mostly 'broken rice' [a byproduct of the milling process] a year. This compares with rice imports for human consumption of around 450,000 tonnes in the UK.")

Helm picks up a handful of salmon kibbles for cats and rolls one around in his fingers. "Cat food actually requires more processing than dog food because it makes it easier to digest. We also add high-quality fats to the surface of cat kibbles to aid palatability. They say that you can't fool a cat as they will detect bad fats. We source our chicken fat from the UK."

Helm says that pet-food trends follow human food trends by about a year. He says that "no carb" pet food is currently the "big thing" largely because pet obesity – it is now estimated that between a quarter and half of the cats and dogs in the UK are obese – has become such a big talking point for the industry. Hypo-allergenic ranges are also popular, with many pet owners reporting that their pets are displaying signs of intolerance to the wheat found in many pet foods. It is one of the reasons why many owners are scaling up to the premium ranges offered by the likes of Lily's Kitchen.

When viewing the sheer scale of the pet-food industry from on high, it can be tempting to agree with Vale's conclusion that we must urgently consider the associated environmental impacts of owning a pet. But the industry, as you might expect, puts up a spirited defence, arguing instead that the pet-food industry is actually a highly efficient processor of what would otherwise largely be waste material from the human food chain.

"Far from being unsustainable, pet-food manufacturing uses material from animals which are inspected by vets as fit for human consumption but which are surplus to the requirements of the human food industry," says Michael Bellingham, the chief executive of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association. "These byproducts must meet the very high safety and quality criteria laid down in European legislation. Without us adding value annually to around 630,000 tonnes of animal byproducts in the UK, it might otherwise have to be disposed of via landfill or incineration. Not very green. Furthermore, a recent report by the Waste and Resources Action Programme [more commonly known as Wrap] is rightly damning of the enormous amounts of food – around 30% – that goes to waste each year. Compare that with the 1% of pet food they found went to disposal."

Bellingham says that the "vast majority" of meat used in pet foods is byproduct from the human food chain, as opposed to "human-grade ingredients" or meat specifically reared for the purpose. The situation with fish, he says, is similar: "The vast majority of the fish ingredients used by industry are the surplus from fish filleting plants, or fishmeal produced from such surpluses. Some 'super premium' products may use human-grade ingredients but, for the very small amount of fish used and the tiny market share, this will have a negligible impact on fish stocks."

But Bellingham also argues that the benefits of pets need to be viewed more holistically, rather than just through the prism of their "carbon pawprint". "Our environment, far from being threatened by pets, is greatly enriched by the part they play in our lives," he says. "Pets in the home instil responsibility, encourage social as well as environmental awareness and have positive

health benefits on children. Furthermore, children from households with pets are found to have stronger immune systems and take fewer days off school. People with pets make fewer visits to the doctor – 21% less for elderly people. What large polluting car improves your health and gets you out for a walk every day?"

Archaeology has shown that we have been living with companion animals for at least 12,000 years. For example, in what is now northern Israel, a dig at the remains of the Natufian settlement called Ain Mallaha revealed the grave of an elderly man who is tenderly cradling a puppy in his arms.

That we greatly benefit from the presence of pets isn't really disputed. But in order to reduce their impact on the environment, should there possibly be a limit to the number of pets we have?

Because, of course, it's not just the food they eat that's the problem. Some conservationists, for example, have long been saying that the population of domesticated cats is having a detrimental impact on native fauna. As obligate carnivores, cats are, by instinct, opportunistic predators. A 2005 study in Bristol, for example, showed that 131 cats returned home 358 animals – birds, small mammals and amphibians – over the course of a year. It didn't record the prey the cats failed to return home.

Professor Stephen Harris, based at the school of biological sciences at the University of Bristol, was one of the study's authors and he believes that the impact of some pets on local ecology needs to be debated much more widely.

"Compulsory neutering of cats is not really practical," he says. "But people really should weigh up the environmental cost of owning a pet. We each need to ask ourselves if we really need a pet? In the US, animal welfare groups strongly recommend that cats are kept indoors. And in Australia, some states are now discussing making it compulsory to neuter cats, as well as introducing 'feline-free' zones where, if found, cats can be trapped and humanely destroyed by the local authority. But here the British attitude to cats is that they should be left to roam as this is natural." (In an earlier study that Harris co-authored, it was calculated that the UK's 7.7 million cats kill around 188 million wild animals a year.)

But Harris says dogs aren't exactly guilt-free, given that an estimated 250,000 tonnes of dog faeces are deposited on our streets and in our parks each year: "It is calculated that 100 tonnes of dog shit is left on Richmond Park in London each year alone. This has a huge impact on the local ecology. If you see aerial photographs of the area, you can see how yellow the grass is around the car park where all the dogs rush out of the owners' cars to urinate. Pets such as dogs and cats can have lots of these little impacts, which really do add up. Ecologically, pets are very demanding and this is a lifestyle choice that is difficult to justify for most people." (In their book, the Vales make the observation that, in San Francisco, city officials say that dog faeces now account for 4% of the municipal waste sent to landfill each year – the same level as used nappies.)

Marina Pacheco, chief executive of the Mammal Society – who owns a cat herself – says education, rather than legislation, is the answer: "We are aware of the huge impact cats have on small mammals. Yes, we probably have too many cats in the UK, but it's too hard to work out the optimum carrying capacity. We have to be pragmatic about the fact that millions of people do own cats. There are things cat owners can do, though. Keeping cats in during dusk and dawn, which is their natural hunting time, is a good idea, as are collar bells. Not owning too many cats is also sensible. One or two is enough and get them neutered, too. It must become socially unacceptable to be an irresponsible pet owner."

Anyone who owns a pet will keenly testify how much joy and companionship they can bring. But they will also acknowledge just how much time, effort and money they can require, too: a tortoise needs its heat and lighting; a horse needs shoeing and a regular supply of straw; an iguana needs its supply of insects; a chicken needs grit and corn; a dog needs its delousing powder; a cat needs a scratch tower. And then there's the insurance, the vet's fees and the annual cost of food and bedding. It's little wonder that some pets are described as being as big a commitment as having a child in the home. So it shouldn't really come as a surprise that some are now viewing pets as having a similar environmental impact to that of a small person. After all, in many owners' eyes, their pets are very much part of the family.

Back at PetIndex, Morrison is handing out samples of her luxury pet food to passersby. "No, we don't use any animal meal in our pet foods," she says proudly to one interested woman. "It's the devil's work. They strip everything that's good off a chicken, even the fat, then they grind it into a powder for pet food. People are fixated on price – most pet food is cheaper than a tin of baked beans. But more and more people are coming round to the view, just as they are doing with their own diet, that quality counts. We've only been going since last November and we've already turned over half a million pounds. We have to start asking more questions about the food we feed our pets."

For altogether different reasons, Morrison is right.

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/life/Saskatoon+regulate+stinky+house/2877557/story.html>

Saskatoon won't regulate stinky cat house

The Vancouver Sun | April 13, 2009

SASKATOON — The gagging smell of cat urine wafting from a Saskatoon backyard isn't enough for the city to implement regulations governing offensive odours.

That's the conclusion of a Saskatoon fire marshal's report, prompted by complaints from neighbours about a house where at least 20 felines live without their owner who purchased the property just for her pets and who does not reside there.

"Where would we stop?" said fire marshal Wayne Rodger. "For the amount of times we get these kinds of issues we thought we could handle them on a case-by-case basis."

The smell is causing the neighbours severe distress, said Saskatoon Coun. Pat Lorje, who requested the report after hearing numerous complaints.

"One family moved out because they couldn't stand the stench," Lorje said.

"The other two threatened to move out. Why should they have to put up with such a smell?"

Such a change to how the city regulates odours would be difficult to enforce because smell, unlike noise, is subjective, Rodger said.

The wafting manure from University of Saskatchewan barns, odours from meat processing plants, vehicle exhaust or perfumes would be difficult to govern if the city implemented new regulations, Rodger said.

"(Meat) cooking may be a 'severe offensive odour' to a vegetarian," Rodger wrote in the report.

"In fact, complaints have been made about neighbours barbecuing. In addition, many people are highly sensitive to perfumes and find any scent to be a 'severe offensive odour.' "

Cat urine has a particularly bad smell because cats have more concentrated uric acid, the chemical that causes pee to smell, because they don't drink water often, the report said.

"As (cat urine) decomposes it releases thiols, which makes the cat urine odour worse," the report said.

Neighbours could use existing property maintenance, animal control and public health laws to deal with the offensive smell, Rodger said.

In this case, public health officials forced the owner to clean up the inside of the home, including removing urine-soaked carpet. The fire department also forced the owner to clean up and remove old vehicles in the backyard and cut down long grass and weeds.

But the smell remains, Lorje said.

"I understand that odours are subjective and, like beauty, are in the nose of the beholder," she said. "But I do believe where any reasonable man or woman would decide this is an offensive odour and when you reach that point there should be some means of sanction."

The backyard of the home is "a litter box," said Clive May, who owns several neighbouring properties.

On Monday, six cats were visible in the backyard with several others peering out windows. The felines go in and out of the house through a small entrance.

The city should look at regulating and enforcing the number of pets allowed in any home if they're unwilling to deal with the odour problem, May said.

He installed cat traps on his property and caught 12 cats in one weekend from the home, he said.

"I've lost a lot of tenants because of the putrid smell," May said. "Whether there's chickens, dogs, or cats people just shouldn't have to tolerate that smell."

<http://www.care2.com/causes/exotic-pets-bad-for-animals-and-humans.html>

Exotic Pets: Bad for Animals, Bad for Humans

Care2.com | September 11, 2010

The Boston Globe is reporting on lax exotic pet laws, specifically those in Ohio and several other states.

Attacks of humans by pets in recent years have stirred up a debate about the merit of keeping exotic animals as personal companions.

In Ohio last month a caretaker was killed while feeding a bear that belonged to one Sam Mazzola. Mazzola kept a menagerie that included bears, wolves and tigers. After the caretaker was mauled, the bear was killed as well.

Not long ago a woman in Connecticut was blinded after being attacked by a friend's pet chimpanzee. And in Florida, a 2-year-old girl was killed by her family's python.

Because it is always an injury of a human by an animal that ignites the debate about the keeping of exotic pets, the debate usually centers around the safety of the humans involved. And while it is extremely dangerous for individuals to keep wild animals, it is the animals who really suffer.

We cannot fault a captive animal that attacks a human caretaker. These animals are not domesticated; they're wild. They are confined and under psychological stress and you cannot hold them accountable for acting on instinct. It's in their nature.

People who keep exotic animals as pets, or in private menageries, are running small-scale zoos. True, they may not be exhibiting animals for the public's amusement, but they are still confining animals for their own amusement. This kind of confinement exerts anxiety and tension on an animal that we cannot understand.

In Ohio specifically, exotic pet laws are being dragged into what is already a complicated animal welfare compromise being given lip service by both sides of the issue, if through gritted teeth. The Humane Society agreed to withdraw efforts to get animal welfare legislation on the ballot in Ohio under the condition that Ohioans implement some of these measures voluntarily.

One of the measures being tweaked is the exotic pet law. The legislation was already being revised to allow people to keep their existing pets, but not to acquire new animals or breed them. In light of recent attacks, especially the bear attack, Ohio Governor Ted

Strickland has acted to expand the measure to allow the state to confiscate animals from owners if necessary.

But this measure is another example of too little too late. None of the measures would eliminate exotic pet ownership entirely, just curtail it. There's absolutely no reason for humans to confine wild animals. Wild animals belong in the wild, not in zoos, and not in the homes of human beings.

Even though it is the rare but tragic instance of an animal hurting a human that makes headlines, it is the animals who suffer silently everyday.