

The Money Myth - taken from Dogs in Canada Magazine

Breeding: The money myth

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*Two thousand bucks for a dog! Are you kidding me?
That breeder must be rolling in it. I wish I could make money so easily!*

It sure sounds lucrative, but responsible dog breeding is not easy money
– sometimes, it's no money at all.



First things first

Before you ever breed a litter, you have to start with a dog – a bitch, actually. Your bitch must be mentally and physically mature enough to have a litter. That means, before you start selling puppies you have to raise and maintain a dog for about two years with no guarantee that she will be suitable for breeding when she grows up.

On top of all the routine stuff that any dog needs, factor in the costs of:

- health tests
- performance tests
- temperament tests
- entry fees
- travel expenses
- vet bills for breeding – progesterone testing; brucellosis screening at a minimum and possibly artificial insemination; X-rays, ultrasound and possible C-section
- stud fees
- registration fees
- travel to the perfect stud dog
- whelping supplies
- emergency supplies
- newsprint by the truckload, for cleanup etc.



Even after all that, you have no puppies yet, but you're probably \$3-5,000 in the hole. Don't forget the hours and hours you've spent training, grooming, cleaning, feeding, driving, and talking to prospective puppy owners – all fun, but still time-consuming.

Realistically, a litter of five puppies at \$1,500 to \$2,000 each does add up to an impressive sum, but also you have to take into account that a litter of two or three barely covers breeding costs.

Pregnancy challenges

Dogs are not machines that can be assembled, and there are no puppies stacked in a storeroom ready to be activated on demand. Dogs come into heat approximately twice a year and they're fertile for only a few days. If you miss that

window of opportunity, there will be no puppies. You'll still be out of pocket – and you'll have to wait half a year before trying again.

The next time around you might do twice as many progesterone tests. It would all be worth it, though, if you learned your bitch is pregnant and, judging by the size of her, has a few pups. But then, she goes into labour and delivers a dead puppy, or no puppies arrive. Or, she has two puppies and you know there are more but nothing is happening, so it's off to the vet in the middle of the night for X-rays and an emergency C-section. Hopefully, the puppies are alive and mom is fine, which is the important thing. Now you have to keep everybody healthy for eight to 12 weeks. If you're lucky, all you'll have to do is make sure no puppies are accidentally smothered by mom, watch the little miracles grow, and clean up constantly. The cleaning process is virtually endless.

For argument's sake, let's say no puppies die or get sick and all you have to pay for is registering the litter, individual registrations, microchips, veterinary checks for specific problems in your breed, vaccinations and food. For a large litter of medium or large-breed dogs, the food can run up a few hundred dollars, but even though you're spending money like water, there is a pot left over – although you are earning every penny at less than minimum wage.

Pregnancy is completely natural and normal for a bitch. Having puppies isn't a disease, but it is physically demanding and there is a limited time that a bitch should be bred. Too young and she won't be ready mentally for puppies; too old and there are higher risks for her and fewer puppies. So you may have two or three litters, but your bitch will live for some years and will need all the usual care and feeding in between her litters and afterward.

If you are serious about a breeding program, you'll want to keep a young hopeful, or two or three, and before long you will be neck deep in dogs. "Dog Poor" they call it. So you either stop breeding for a few years or find good homes for dogs that are not breeding.

Dark realities

Dogs that are properly cared for, given a life beyond living in a cage making puppies, are going to cut into the bottom line. Puppy mills make money by cutting back on dog care – and, in extreme cases, cutting back on the necessities of life. Buying a puppy from a pet store rewards these profiteers at the expense of the dogs they abuse.

Shelters are full of dogs produced in this way, bought and disposed of on impulse. Responsible breeders don't breed unless they are prepared to take responsibility for each puppy they produce, and that means from birth to death. It doesn't happen often, because we screen buyers carefully, but life-changing events do occur, and sometimes a dog needs to be re-homed. Reputable breeders re-home and care for their dogs and do not add to the shelter population.

According to some extremists, breeding dogs for money is only slightly more acceptable than eating them for dinner. Dog breeders are supposed to lose money, presumably, because they care about their dogs. By that logic, anybody who loves their job should do it for free. Doctors should be paupers because they care about their patients.

Reputable, responsible breeders charge less for a puppy than a pet store and provide a better environment for their breeding dogs and puppies, plus knowledge, expertise and support for the lifetime of the dog. Dog breeding, when done properly, has a high overhead and uncertain outcomes. The hours are horrendous, the pay is terrible, but you'll never be without a dog.

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