

AKC PUREBRED PRESERVATION BANK

DR. CHARLES GARVIN, Delegate, Dalmatian Club of America

Preserving Gene Pools

Long term preservation of our breeds has become a central issue of focus for many AKC Parent Clubs. Preservation is not just for the breeds with lower than average levels of breeding activity, but for any breed that might face genetic bottlenecks or other genetic difficulties, now or in the future.

Every day, potentially valuable frozen semen is abandoned and destroyed because the owner dies or becomes incapacitated, or bills do not get paid.

New diseases are being discovered, new tests are being developed and new knowledge about the genetics of existing diseases emphasize the importance of the availability of semen from previous generations. Historically, we know that disastrous events such as World War 2 have led to near

extinction of several famous breeds. The historically valuable traits of our breeds' stars are currently being continually lost. Imagine if it were possible to add the quality conformation or health traits of an outstanding specimen of your breed from 50 or more years ago to today's gene pool.

Preserving genetic material in the form of frozen semen of former and current quality dogs will have great value in future decades for maintaining and improving purebred dogs, and can mitigate the risk of extinction of some less popular breeds. Encouraging and facilitating such banking is in the best interests of the sport of purebred dogs and a worthy endeavor for AKC.

In 2017, following a request from the Otterhound Club of America, AKC modified regulations permitting Parent Clubs to establish their own PC sponsored Reproductive Banks. This facilitates preservation and appropriate use of frozen semen from dogs whose genetic contributions would otherwise be lost, and it has been a great step forward.

However, in the subsequent 4 years, only one other club has requested permission to start a bank. Although the mechanism is straightforward, and well documented in the Toolbox that is available from AKC, it is fairly complex, requir-

ing considerable effort by the Parent Club, which may have a very small membership. For example, currently parent clubs are required to establish a new separate organizational entity to own the frozen semen. Additionally, many clubs are unaware of this reproductive bank opportunity and what might be involved.

To address this significant need, the AKC Board at our January meeting established a workgroup consisting of Charles Garvin, MD,

Preserving genetic material in the form of frozen semen of former and current quality dogs will have great value in future decades for maintaining and improving purebred dogs

AKC Board member, Chair; Joellen Gregory, DVM, member of the Delegate Canine Health Committee; Marty Greer, DVM, JD, Director of Veterinary Services - Revival Animal Health; Jerry Klein, DVM, AKC Chief Veterinary Officer; Mark Dunn, AKC Ex-

ecutive Vice-President, and Vanessa Skou, AKC Executive, Breeder Development; with Ted Phillips, AKC Chief Financial Officer, on call as needed. We have met several times via zoom, and conducted much email and telephone correspondence. You may have seen our presentation at the Delegate's Canine Health Committee in March.

The goals of the workgroup are as follows:

- Encourage the development and use of parent club authorized reproductive banking
- Maintain parent club authority for breeding decisions
- Consider all possible legal, economic, administrative and organizational factors
- Be sensitive to potential political realities

We have considered various alternatives and carefully evaluated multiple factors of each alternative, both those that are advantageous and those that are disadvantageous. We continue to gather information and data and elicit input from parent club officers, delegates, AKC staff, breeders, exhibitors, and semen banks.

We have concluded that the best choice is for AKC to create a new AKC Purebred Preservation

Bank, available for all parent clubs. This would be a new 501c3 not for profit organization, a controlled affiliate similar in structure to AKC Reunite and the AKC Humane Fund. AKC would manage and fund the storage of frozen semen, but parent clubs would have specific responsibilities and authorities, such as establishing a decision making entity, developing criteria for the acceptance and release of stored semen, and designating an authorized signatory. This scenario would have the advantage that parent clubs would not need to create or fund a new organization, and AKC could use economies of scale and negotiate favorable prices for storage and other costs. Most policies and procedures would be applicable to all breeds, but customization for the specific needs of individual breeds would be possible. AKC could deal with the many existing semen storage banks across the country, and the variety of state laws, to acquire frozen semen that has been or will be abandoned, and ensure a proper chain of ownership.

We expect to maintain the current option of a separate parent club sponsored semen bank, as authorized by the AKC Board in 2017, as this may be appropriate for some breeds. However, this option has been rarely used, and we believe that enhanced education and promotion may increase utilization.

The concept of maintaining freedom of choice and multiple options is an important feature inherent in this proposal:

- Parent clubs can utilize the AKC preservation bank or create their own
- Parent clubs can choose whether or not to participate
- Parent clubs can create their own criteria for acceptance and release of semen
- Parent clubs can choose who and how to make decisions regarding banked semen
- Breeders may choose, or not, to donate frozen semen, now or in their estate
- Breeders may choose, or not, to use frozen semen in the future
- Semen storage facilities can choose to donate abandoned semen

We have concluded that the best choice is for AKC to create a new AKC Purebred Preservation Bank, available for all parent clubs.

The next key step will be approval by the AKC Board, which we expect will occur at the July or August meeting. Our workgroup is pursuing multiple avenues of communication to ensure

that the proposal to the board is as acceptable as possible. A survey has been sent to all parent clubs' President, Secretary, Delegate and Health Committee Chair (if applicable), querying their individual level of awareness of current banking options, educating them on their existence, and assessing their potential level of interest and involvement in a preservation bank. The preliminary survey results showed a high level of interest and enthusiasm. We will be collecting information on the frozen semen storage facilities throughout the country, including those run by individual veterinarians. We expect to have further discussions at the Delegate Committee meetings in June.

While many of the operational and procedural details will need to be worked out, the delegates can help the process by encouraging their parent clubs to learn about the proposed AKC Purebred Preservation Bank, discuss how it may apply to their club, and raise any questions or concerns that may arise.

Intensive and widespread communication will be essential to the success of this project. We want to encourage and address any and all concerns, and make any improvements or modifications to maximally strengthen the proposal and encourage appropriate utilization of preservation banking.

This is a long term project, and it will be important to emphasize that its success may not manifest until several decades hence, long after we are all gone. The risk is relatively small, but the potential rewards are tremendous.

Any of the members of the workgroup are happy to answer any questions that you or your club members have, as well as any suggestions or other thoughts.

I can be reached at charles.garvin@gmail.com or 740.361.0025. Thank you for your interest.