

# #PetPower – Event Report

An interactive chat about the benefits of pets and how to encourage better care

Brussels, 1 October 2020

The European animal health and pet food industry associations, AnimalhealthEurope and FEDIAF hosted a virtual event, entitled #PetPower, to highlight the the positive role of pets in society, leveraging examples of how pets helped people during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the importance of responsible pet ownership.

The event was attended by well over 300 people from across Europe, all with different backgrounds, but with a very clear interest in helping to raise awareness on the importance of recognising the human-animal bond benefits for health and highlighting the need for more education on what is needed to ensure responsible pet care.

Our panel of experts and influencers discussed the many ways in which pets benefit society and pinpointed a number of challenges existing in Europe with pet ownership, somewhat exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**MEP Petras Auštrevičius, vice-president of the Parliamentary Intergroup on Animal Welfare:** Highlighted the multiple benefits of owning a pet, as well as the need for the EU take action to protect the welfare of pets, e.g. share best practices amongst the EU countries. He announced that the Intergroup on Animal Welfare was starting a subgroup on companion animal welfare in order to bring such issues to the attention of EU decision-makers. The group is calling for companion animals to be included in the new EU animal welfare strategy.

**Suzie Carley, chair of the EU Dog and Cat Alliance:**

Spoke about the need for harmonisation at EU-Level on identification of pets, welfare standards for breeders, as well as greater awareness and signalling of unscrupulous traders of animals online. She highlighted that with a lack of regulation in these areas, animals are falling victim to serious welfare and health issues. During the discussion she also covered the concerns that many people have either abandoned their pets because of misbeliefs about COVID-19 transmission, or have decided to get a pet during lockdown without being aware of the responsibilities involved and then later given up those pets.

**Marie-José Ender-Slegers, president of IAHAIO (human-animal interaction organisation):**

Highlighted the many learnings from research into the human-animal bond and called for public agencies, authorities and politicians to step up investment into research and to consider the research when forming health policies, etc. She also explained how greater studies into animal emotions and psychology can help guide better standards for pet partnerships, improving responsible ownership.

**Claire Guest, CEO of Medical Detection Dogs:**

Provided an update on the current status of the dogs in training to detect COVID-19 and how they are likely to be able to help countries manage the pandemic. She highlighted the power of the dog's sense of smell in detecting health issues and how dogs are now actively helping people with various health issues, including diabetes and severe allergies. She called on authorities to recognise the reports on the cost-savings associated with assistance animals.

# #PetPower – Event Report

An interactive chat about the benefits of pets and how to encourage better care

Brussels, 1 October 2020

During the discussion Claire clarified that all Medical Detection Dogs in training are owned by the charity and live in either foster homes or with the trainers. As they come into the centre for training up to 5 days a week they have to be within half an hour of the centre.

There was a lot of exchange between participants in the chat part of the discussion and several questions were raised with the panellists.

Participants also shared interesting information on a number of key topics:

## **Pets as companions in hospital settings:**

- **Alejandra Norniella Monacci:** In Barcelona (Spain), some hospitals allow dogs to enter with the owner, for instance in the time before a surgical intervention, or during long periods of convalescence.
- **Magali Gavaret:** In Belgium, Villa Samson offers the opportunity for pet owners to go to the hospital with their pets (dogs and cats) as companions.

## **Alert and assistance dogs:**

- **Daniel Rodes:** I know dog trainers who train dogs to alert owners at times when glucose levels exceed the physiological levels indicating the need for an insulin injection.

## **The increase in pet adoptions during the pandemic:**

- **Federica Burgio:** In Spain we are suffering an increase of abandoned pets about 25%<sup>1</sup> vs 2019
- **Daniel Rodes:** How can we ensure those new adoptions of pets will provide an adequate level of coverage of pets' needs and interests.
- **Nicole Paley:** PFMA UK launched new research today which showed that 11%<sup>2</sup> of UK households have acquired a new pet during the pandemic (Kantar Survey July 2020).

## **Abandonment of animals due to misinformation on COVID-19 or lockdown requirements**

- **Mirena Todorova:** There are many abandoned animals due to COVID 19.
- **Tatjana Zajec:** We have around 30% less abandoned dogs in Zagreb due to travel restrictions. Especially across borders of Serbia and Bosnia.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> [https://www.elconfidencial.com/alma-corazon-vida/2020-06-19/crece-abandono-perros-desescalada-coronavirus\\_2646379/](https://www.elconfidencial.com/alma-corazon-vida/2020-06-19/crece-abandono-perros-desescalada-coronavirus_2646379/)
  - <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20200608/abandonos-animales-domesticos-se-han-disparado-espana-durante-meses-confinamiento/2015761.shtml>
  - [https://www.abc.es/sociedad/abci-dispara-abandono-mascotas-tras-final-confinamiento-202007270116\\_noticia.html](https://www.abc.es/sociedad/abci-dispara-abandono-mascotas-tras-final-confinamiento-202007270116_noticia.html)
  - <sup>2</sup> <https://www.pfma.org.uk/news/pfma-confirms-dramatic-rise-in-pet-acquisition-among-millennials->

# #PetPower – Event Report

An interactive chat about the benefits of pets and how to encourage better care

Brussels, 1 October 2020

## Illegal trade of companion animals:

- **Mirena Todorova:** Animal trade is often illegal and there is no criteria or regulation for acquiring a pet. In Bulgaria pets are considered a property according to law and not as a living-being and companion.
- **Nathalie Gamain:** It is important to stress that animal trade is subject to regulations as any other trade activities. This means that responsible industry operators run their activities in line with the various countries' regulations and EU ones
- **Gerrit Hofstra:** The main problem in the Netherlands is the fact that we have a yearly deficit of around 40,000 to 60,000 puppies. This gives rise to illegal trade with all the related problems.

## Educating on responsible pet ownership:

- **Elly von Jessen:** Many organisations can now also act to educate owners and follow up on different concerns we might rightly have
- **Sam worthy:** There are some organisations trying to educate new owners on responsibilities of ownership and then connecting them to responsible breeders and rehoming groups.
- **Mirena Todorova:** The problem is not just this wave of pet abandonments now. There will be more in the future. The problem can be solved in the long-term through better pet trade regulations in all countries and by countries encouraging different methods of adoption and informing on responsible long-term pet care.
- **Tammie 'O'Leary:** Assuming some of the unfortunate pets that will require rehoming at a later date are microchipped, perhaps a tracking system could be used to help establish why people decided they needed to rehome pets. If we know it was mainly financial or being ill-educated when they took the decision to take on a pet, this can be used as a deterrent in the future. That is if owners wanted to be honest as to why they could not manage the pet.
- **Pauline Davey:** Having access to a wide range of pet species .e.g fish, reptiles, birds, is important because it enables people to pick the right pet for their lifestyle. That might actually lead to less pet abandonment, e.g. for people who get a dog and then find they can't really accommodate them into the way they live their lives. Other pet types might suit their life better – e.g. having a beautiful fish tank or reptiles that don't need the same activity that a dog does. Education is key to make sure people know what they are taking on and giving whatever pet they choose the best life.
- **Hildegard Niemann:** We should have a "check-list" for potential owners to find out which animal fits in their lifestyle.
- **Silke Santana to everyone:** A huge responsibility lies with agencies/breeders that have the pets available for adoptions. I just relocated 4 cats (2 with special needs) from the US to the EU. The shelter I adopted them from in the US specialize in cats with conditions. Their adoption process is more of an interview and requires a contact with certain conditions. One clause includes that the cat is returned to them if an adopter can no longer care for it no matter what the reason
- **Sarah Carr:** Sadly, some websites still seem to feature many dogs that look like they are from puppy farms, if you have knowledge of the sector. Sadly, the messaging on puppy farms is very difficult to get to people – especially when children see their friends getting puppies during lockdown!

# #PetPower – Event Report

An interactive chat about the benefits of pets and how to encourage better care

Brussels, 1 October 2020

- **Mirena Todorova:** In our experience German law and system is quite good for encouraging and pushing pet owners to be responsible and treat and train their pets appropriately. So maybe it can be researched and given as an example for all EU countries

## There was general consensus that more could be done at EU-level on the following issues:

- Recognition of the bi-directional relationship between people and animals, and how that has become more apparent during the pandemic. And recognition that Covid-19 has helped stimulate illegal pet trade as regular/trustworthy channels cannot meet expectations.
- Making sure that the relationship is beneficial for both parties, finding a harmonised way to forge a sense of social responsibility for pet care. Promote the fact it's a life-long responsibility to share our lives with companion animals and how to understand and look after their needs.
- Addressing the evidence available on the human-animal bond benefits. Ensuring more research to help policy makers and other groups accept the potential health savings and benefits of pet ownership.
- Investigating more financial support for research on the human-animal bond, perhaps through Horizon Europe.
- Increasing access to pets for those in rented accommodation or homes.
- A review of veterinary charges and how they are organised.

# THANK YOU ALL

FOR CELEBRATING  
**#PETPOWER**  
WITH US

