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CHALLENGES

Unwanted dogs are a source for many animal welfare and public health concerns in the US

- overcrowded shelters
- high euthanasia ratio

California has the highest shelter euthanasia rates in the US

- suspected to be worse in rural areas

In addition to economic issues, owners blame dogs' temperament as the major reason for surrender

- unestablished or weak bonds and undesirable behaviors
- dogs with behavioral issues are less likely to be adopted and more likely to be euthanized

Studies have suggested that adopters have strong preferences for dog's appearance or physical traits, but little is known about behavioral traits

- dogs that are purebred, small, young, light-colored coat are preferred

Population demographics also appear to play an important role on dog adoption, abandonment and euthanasia



Understanding adopter choices and their decision-making process behind an adoption can help us to identify potential pitfalls that may lead to weak or unestablished bonds

PURPOSE

The goal is to generate pilot data to identify the unwanted dog population, adopter demographics and preferences in rural California.

To address the objectives, IBR approved surveys were used to measure:

1. Shelter dog population in rural Northern California
2. Characteristics of dogs chosen for adoption and contrast with adopter preferences before adoption



PRELIMINARY, DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

SHELTERS: 3 public, open-admission

- All 3 shelters conducted a physical exam at admission but only two evaluated the dog's behavior
- The table below indicates monthly averages and ranges for number of dogs admitted, euthanasia and adoption ratios (% of dogs admitted).

Shelter	Dogs admitted	Euthanasia ratio	Adoption ratio
Chico	76 (15 - 100)	6% (0 - 13%)	16% (7 - 53%)
Colusa	55 (43 - 81)	12% (3 - 20%)	17% (10 - 32%)
Tehama	123 (78 - 214)	7% (1 - 17%)	28% (15 - 40%)

STATED PREFERENCES

Appearance or physical traits

- Most respondents declared that dog's appearance somewhat matter, they were looking for a medium to large dog that is younger than 6 years old 
- However, 60+% had no preference for sex or bred, and about 50% of them could not describe specific traits (e.g., coat length and color) that they were looking for

Temperament or behavioral traits

- All respondents declared that dog's behavior is important, for 33% it was extremely important 
- 68+% said to prefer dogs that are affectionate, friendly and interact well with people
- 60+% said to not tolerate dogs that chew on or tear things, urinate or defecate indoors, and excessive barking

DEMOGRAPHICS: 72 persons, 49% from Chico



- 80+% were White or Latino between 18-30 years old
- 46+% have some college education, work part-time and their income is <\$25,000/year
- Most have a household size of 2-5 people, rent/lease a house and do not have kids



- 85% are looking for a companion/family dog, the majority have never adopted a dog
- 72% would be the primary caregiver and most are willing to spend weeks/months until the dog adjusts to their home

CHOSEN PREFERENCES

When presented with 38 choices of dogs' video clips and their behavioral descriptions (+/- attributed by owners)

- Most respondents chose purebred, medium, young dogs
- These dogs had some common positive behavioral traits: friendly, calm, smart, loyal
- Common unwanted behaviors among them were harder to pinpoint, except some were jumpy and energetic
- The top ranked dogs are pictured below



PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

- Dogs that were admitted by the 3 shelters were more likely to be adopted than euthanized; euthanasia ratio was relatively low
- Adopters were willing to spend time until the dog adjusts to the new home, but many have never adopted a shelter dog before
- Behavioral traits were judged to be more important than physical characteristics, but more data is needed to understand their choices