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On the Horizon

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"ON THE HORIZON"

PAPERWORK and recordkeeping associated with dog boarding, breeding, showing or racing require a staggering amount of time, patience, and care. Health, nutrition, pedigrees, whelping, and show information must all be kept track of and somehow related to breeding dates, special diets, vaccination schedules and more. In addition, these diverse but related facts must be kept at one's fingertips for immediate recall. All of us know how difficult, tedious, and time-consuming this task becomes when many years of records are filed in drawers or cardboard boxes. Help, however, may now be on the horizon.

The Epidemiology Section at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine has received a two-year grant from ALPO Pet Foods Inc., to ascertain the needs of breeders and kennels and to develop computer software that will be compatible with many of the popular microcomputers currently on the market. The eventual goal is to create a computer network of concerned kennel owners who are electronically linked with veterinary experts at the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (VHUP) so that health problems can be detected early and solutions provided before matters become serious.

This project was begun in the summer of 1983 by a team consisting of Drs. Lawrence T. Glickman and Alice Jayne Payton at VHUP and Messrs. John Louchhiem and Joseph Doherty, computer software specialists from The Reohr Group, Inc., Media, Pa. Initially, the team visited different types of kennels to determine the needs and expectations of kennel owners. They then spent several months outlining and defining the principal components of the kennel record system and how these components relate to one another. Also considered were techniques to facilitate data entry into the computer so that users would not be overwhelmed by the new "gadget in their midst" and how to keep costs down by using commercially available software whenever possible. Finally, they had to decide on the most affordable computer hardware to support the system and how the machines would communicate with VHUP.

The software package developed is suitable for kennels or breeders with up to 500 dogs. Dr. Glickman feels that "the basic software package will contain about 80-90 percent of what most people want and that additional capabilities can be added as the program matures." The basic package offers the capacity to enter and retrieve information for individual dogs or for groups of dogs. Individual dog data includes: identity (name and AKC number), markings, age, sex, breed, and comments or special notations. Programs will be provided for creation of a four-generation pedigree and an individualized history of treatments, illnesses, diet, weight, reproduction, and show or racing performance. For the kennel as a whole, there is a reminder list for vaccinations, coming events, and a mailing list of clients or other kennels. The customized software can be used in conjunction with standard word-processing packages to send out mailings or with graphics packages to display data.



The minimum hardware necessary to support such a system consists of a desk-top microcomputer, a monitor or videoscreen, a printer, and a modem to permit hookup with the computer in the Section of Epidemiology. Dr. Glickman pointed out that "having this hookup will enable us to send member kennels announcements of new developments in veterinary medicine, warnings regarding new diseases or product recalls, and abstracts of articles from veterinary journals and have them appear on the printer or screen at the kennel. Upcoming shows, seminars, or other

events could be announced in a similar manner." Kennel owners could also choose to electronically send part or all of their records to VHUP for analysis or advice if they suspect a problem. In addition, pedigree records could be transmitted to VHUP for determination of the coefficient of relatedness between two dogs before they are mated. Whenever possible, the kennel's own veterinarian will be alerted to any potential problems. Eventually, we hope that many veterinarians will participate in this network as they acquire computers in their practices. Provisions will be made to ensure that all records in the network are confidential and can be released only with approval of the kennel involved.

Currently, the initial software package is being tested in one kennel and shortly will be placed in a second. The two computers being evaluated are the IBM-PC and the Columbia which is an "IBM-PC work alike." However, other microcomputers may also be used. In each of these kennels, our software experts help to assemble the equipment and test it. They also provide instruction and ongoing technical support to the kennel personnel who are responsible for data entry and retrieval.

During the next six months, the software will be refined further. Based on our experience and by evaluating your responses to the questionnaire below, additional improvements will be made and priorities established for future development. Details regarding hardware, software, subscription procedure and availability will be announced as soon as possible. Additional information and a demonstration will be available at VHUP during the AKC Centennial Dog Show in November 1984.

1. Name [Optional]: _____

2. Address [Optional]: _____
 _____ zip _____ Phone _____

3. Dog Breed(s): _____ Kennel Size: _____
 Major use of dogs: _____

4. What do you consider to be the three most useful features of a kennel management system? Please rank them from 1 to 3.
 Individual dog data Pedigree data Show data Medical data Dietary data
 Breeding/whelping data Other _____

5. Do you own a home computer? Yes No Considering purchasing one
 If yes, what kind? _____
 If yes, would you purchase our kennel software, if it was compatible with your current computer? Yes No Maybe

6. If you do not own a computer, would you consider purchasing the kennel software and a computer recommended by VHUP?
 Yes No Maybe

7. If you purchased the kennel software and/or hardware, would you consider subscribing to a VHUP service that assisted you with computer or kennel veterinary problems and sent you announcements and abstracts of veterinary medical articles on a regular basis?
 Yes No Maybe

8. We anticipate that the computer hardware {includes screen, modem, printer, terminal, word-processing software, spreadsheet} will cost \$3,000 to \$4,000. Do you consider this to be a reasonable investment?
 Yes No Possibly

Would you be willing to spend \$500-\$1,000 for the kennel software package as described in this article? Yes No Maybe

What would you be willing to spend for a yearly subscription to the VHUP Network? \$ _____

Thank you for your time. Please return to:

9. Additional comments or suggestions would be welcome: _____

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