

Us vs. Them

Dear Mr. John Q. Public,

I know you must be frustrated about not being able to get a Newf puppy right away, especially when you're missing your old dog so much. Every time you mention a breeder you've found on the Internet or a local newspaper, we've responded with a "buyer-beware" kind of warning. You even mentioned that our answers were beginning to sound like an "Us vs. Them" debate.

Well, you're partially right. That's because the Newfoundland Club of America (NCA) and its regional clubs are trying to do two things.

First, we have made a commitment to maintain and improve the Newfie breed - that's what breed clubs are for.

Second, we're here to help consumers like you find a healthy, typical Newfoundland to add to your family.

Are we saying you won't find a healthy puppy from a non-member breeder? No.

Are we saying every puppy produced by an NCA or regional club member is guaranteed to be sound and healthy? No, of course not.

What we ARE saying is that we're here to help you make the most informed decision possible when choosing that new puppy. You've already made it clear that you're looking for a companion/family member that will be around to share your life for the next 10-12 years. We don't want to see you saddled with a veterinary or behavioral nightmare that leaves you emotionally and financially drained for 9 of those years because of inherited defects.

So who are the "us" and who are the "them?"

The "Us" are those NCA and regional clubs' members who care enough about the breed to go the extra mile and learn all we possibly can about Newfoundlands. We network with others who have far more experience and we pass on what we learn to those who are new to the breed.

"Us" are the people who cry when we see the abuse and/or neglect that some of these "Backyard-bred" Newfs have endured. We spend our club money to nurse them back to health, because their owners couldn't or wouldn't. We participate in and support Rescue. We take up the slack because the "breeder" often can't or won't help with one of their dogs that ends up in Rescue. Often they will not even take responsibility for breeding the dog in the first place.

"Us" are the breeders that invest the money and time to do health clearances on our dogs. We research pedigrees and network with other breeders in order to make the best possible decisions before planning appropriate breedings. We answer phone calls about problems our puppies/new owners may be having - from feeding to housebreaking to illness, etc. We take our puppies back at any age, and for whatever reason. We have written contracts that are clear and straightforward.

During our "screening period" we counsel people who "think they want" a Newf and try to help them realize that a Newf might not be the most appropriate breed for them. We spend hours and hours and hours trying to educate the public about our breed. Often, we end up helping people who buy puppies from other people, have problems with them, and then can't get their "breeder" to answer their questions.

Most of "us" have puppies only when we have the time and resources to produce them. Typically, we have the female and have to arrange to find an appropriate male with compatible pedigrees and health clearances. We then pay a stud fee, a semen collection fee, an insemination fee, and if we're lucky, the mating results in a pregnancy. Then we pay for all the health check fees for the entire litter until they're at least 10 weeks old.

"We" keep our dogs as family pets, or close to family pets. Many of us try to breed dogs that carry on the Newfoundland's heritage and we participate in water, draft, obedience or therapy work with our Newfs - In other words, our Newfs do something other than just lay around and make more Newfs.

So who are "Them"?

They are people who produce Newfs with the idea that this can be a significant source of income for them. We're not saying that they don't love the breed, love their dogs, or that their dogs are "bad." What we're saying is that many of these "breeders" don't take responsibility for the dogs they produce. They can't or won't help puppy buyers when asked. They often lack enough "Newf Experience" to answer questions. Many do not help their own puppy buyers by taking a puppy back or helping financially if a dog they bred needs expensive surgery.

Prior to breeding their dogs, they may do some of the clearances, but usually not all of those recommended by the NCA. They frequently don't submit the clearances to the OFA because that costs money. Some do submit the clearances, but that does not guarantee that their dogs are typical of the breed in type or temperament. Health is just one aspect of the breed.

"They" may or may not show, participate in working events, or do therapy work with their Newfs. They know there's a market out there and they take advantage of it. They have low "overhead" because they have males and females right on their property and it doesn't cost them a thing to do a breeding. Many of them seem to ask more money for puppies than some of the top show kennels.

While the Internet is wonderful, it is not the best place to purchase a Newfoundland puppy. "They" do a lot of business on the internet because they can reach a lot of prospective puppy buyers. They're confident in the knowledge that most people won't make the effort to actually come to their "kennel" and see first hand how the breeder takes care of all the dogs. They can put the photo of any dog on their website and we all assume it's really a photo of the dog they claim it is.

I know this is long but I want to go over a few points about "puppy mills" because I feel that most people are ignorant about the dog breeding "business."

When people set out to make money from breeding dogs, it becomes a "livestock" business. I can not figure out how, if people test for all the appropriate clearances (hip/elbow/cystinuria/heart) at the appropriate age (2 yrs for hips/elbows) they can make money breeding Newfoundlands unless they pay nothing for stud service/breeding costs and produce multiple litters a year.

There are ways to spot puppy mills - or for-profit breeders, especially on the internet sites:

- 1) They'll advertise multiple breeds for sale. Why? They can make more money. Conscientious breeders focus on one, or maybe two breeds and do their best for those breeds.
- 2) They'll take "pay pal" or other pay over the internet. You have to give money before a puppy is in your hands. And, obviously in that case, they're shipping a puppy to you sight unseen - never good unless you know LOTS of people that you trust who say that particular person is safe to deal with long distance.
- 3) When you inquire about puppies they ask you very few questions about yourself, what you're going to do with the puppy - their main questions are about leaving a deposit/shipping/etc. They probably will spend lots of time telling you how great their dogs are and how big they are.
- 4) When asked if they show their dogs or belong to a regional/national club they're apt to reply that they don't show because "Dog shows are just beauty contests and it's all just political anyway" or "We don't belong to any clubs because it's all one big clique and we just aren't like that - we're for the common folk."
- 5) Check out their contract prior to spending any money -ALWAYS. That way you'll know in advance if there's any guarantee. If there is a guarantee, then see what you have to do in order to get some restitution - and decide if you're willing to do it. A common ploy is to require the buyer (you) to return the puppy if there's a problem and you want a refund, even a partial one. Are YOU going to be the one to break the news to your family? These breeders are banking on your love for the dog to not going through with that option.
- 6) On their website or at their facility you'll see that they have lots of dogs - both males and females. Some of them "specialize" in "rare" brown and white or gray and white. Avoid like the plague anyone who advertises like

that - they are trying to get more money for particular colors that aren't even in the breed standard. Some breeders even charge more for browns or Landseers as well.

As we said at the beginning, our role as avid Newfoundland fans is to help educate you so that you can make good decisions. We care about where you purchase a puppy because we want you to have a good experience and get a good healthy puppy. And, for our own selfish reasons, we don't want to have to console you later on as you try to deal with potentially heartbreaking decisions or while you're asking yourself "Why did I buy my dog on the internet?"

So the point is, do your legwork, consider the things we've said, ask the appropriate questions and decide if you feel good about the answers. If you think the answers are good and you feel comfortable dealing with the breeder for the next 10 years, if the contract seems fair and reasonable etc, then go for it. We're not telling you not to get a puppy from "Newfs-R-Us" or "Joe Breeder" or anyone else. We're telling you to arm yourself with knowledge before you commit. We hope this will help you make an informed choice.

Best Regards,
Responsible Newf Breeder