



KNOW THE FACTS



Before Breeding Your Rat or Mouse!

By Nichole Royer

We think it is extremely important to learn the facts and possible consequences in advance if you are contemplating breeding your rat or mouse. In today's overcrowded world, we, the wardens of our domestic pets, must make responsible decisions for them and for ourselves. Please consider the following points carefully.

QUALITY: A pedigree is NOT an indication of quality. Most rats and mice should not be bred. Though wonderful pets, many have defects of health, temperament, or structure which should not be perpetuated. Breeding animals should be proven free of these defects BEFORE starting on a reproductive career. Breeding should only be done with the goal of IMPROVEMENT—an honest attempt to create rats and mice better than their parents. Ignorance is no excuse—once you have created a life, you can't take it back, even if blind, crippled, badly diseased, or a rodent psychopath!

COST: Rat and mouse breeding is NOT a money-making venture, if done correctly. Proper housing, extra food, correct bedding, advertising, possible vet bills, etc., are all costly and must be paid BEFORE the babies can be sold. An unexpected Cesarean may cost several hundred dollars. This would be an impossible amount to recoup even IF the babies lived, and IF you could sell them. Most breeders consider themselves lucky if they can break even on a litter.

SALES: First time breeders have no reputation and no referrals to help them find buyers. Previous promises of, "I want a rat just like yours," evaporate. Consider the time and expense of caring for babies that

may not sell until they are 4 months old, 6 months old, or more! What WOULD you do if your babies did not sell? Send them to the pound to be euthanized? Dump them in the country to fend for themselves and starve to death? Sell them cheap to a pet store to be used as snake food? Remember, the average litter is 8 to 12 kittens, and can be much more. Where are you going to find homes for a litter of 20?

JOY OF BIRTH: If you're doing it for the children's education, remember that the birth may be at 4 A.M., or at the vet's on the surgery table. Even if the kiddies are present, they may get a chance to see the birth of a stillborn or watch the doe writhe in pain attempting to deliver a baby which is too large. Some does are not natural mothers and either ignore or savage their litter. Does can have severe delivery problems or even die in the process of giving birth. Babies can be born dead or with gross deformities that require euthanasia. Of course there can be joy, but if you can't deal with the possibility of tragedy, don't start.

TIME: Many veteran breeders of quality rats spend several minutes a day, every day with EACH baby during the first 2 weeks of its life. The time doubles on the third week. That can mean well over 80 hours of labor in raising an average litter to 6 weeks. Both before and after the delivery, mom needs special care, attention, and feeding. Babies need daily checking, socialization, careful feeding, and their cage needs lots of cleaning. More hours are spent doing paperwork, pedigrees, and interviewing buyers. If you have any abnormal problems such as sick babies, or a doe who can't or won't care for her little ones, count on double or triple the time. If you can't pro-

vide the time, you will either have dead kittens or poor ones that are bad tempered, antisocial, dirty and/or sickly—hardly a buyer's delight.

HUMANE RESPONSIBILITIES:

There are MILLIONS of unwanted animals put to death in pounds in this country each year, including many rats and mice. Many more die homeless and unwanted through starvation, disease, abuse, neglect, etc. The breeder who creates a life is responsible for that life. Will you carefully educate potential buyers on the responsibilities and duties entailed in owning a rat or mouse? Or will you just take the money and not worry if the rat is locked in a cramped cage all its life, forgotten and neglected? Will you turn down a sale to irresponsible owners? Or will you say "yes" and not think about the baby you held and loved now having a litter every time she comes into season in order to create more uncared-for statistics? Would you be prepared to take back a grown rat or mouse if the owners could no longer care for it? Or can you live with the thought that the baby you helped bring into the world will be destroyed at the pound?

The views expressed herein are of the author and do not reflect any policy of the American Fancy Rat and Mouse Association.

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