

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Jose, CA 2005 Pet Demographic Study

In 1992 a proposal was made to ban the breeding of all dogs and cats in San Jose due to the high and ever-increasing numbers of dogs and cats being euthanized at the shelter. During well-attended council hearings on the matter in 1993 a presentation was made by National Pet Alliance outlining the trends in the pet and shelter populations and presenting the results of a 1000 household study on dogs and cats in Santa Clara County. One of the major findings was that nearly 41% of the known cat population were unowned/free-roaming/feral cats. Feral cats and their unweaned kittens were the primary intake at the shelter. As a result, the city manager's office was instructed to meet with interested parties to come up with a solution other than the mandatory spay/neuter of owned cats, which were already altered at a high percentage rate.

As a result of the meetings, a consensus was reached that altering stray cats was a desirable solution. San Jose then became the first city in the country to municipally fund a no cost spay/neuter program for owned/unowned or feral cats and encourage trap/neuter/return of feral cats. These vouchers proved very popular in the community, with thousands of cats altered in the first few years.

Within 2 years of the October 1994 inception, dramatic results were noted in the shelter cat intakes. After 5 years, a Humane Society Silicon Valley Executive Summary report at the conclusion of a task force review, found that for every \$1 spent on this program, \$5 in animal control costs had been saved. In 2000, animal control savings were estimated at nearly 3 million dollars on program expenditures of \$575,873. There were 16% fewer cats entering the shelter than in FY95.

By 2006, cat intakes at the shelter had declined 24% since 1993 despite the increasing human population, and nearly 1/3 of households owning cats. The annual 6% increase in shelter cat intakes through the 80's had stopped and reversed. A similar, but non-municipally funded program in San Diego, begun in 1992, achieved even better intake reduction as a result of their focus on feral cats only.

A second 1000 household study of Santa Clara County was performed in 2005 to measure the changes in the pet population since 1993 and examine the shelter population trends. All parts of the county were contacted, by a professional polling company through a random computer generated phone list. Calls were made in proportion to the number of houses in a zip code as compared to the entire county. The questionnaire was designed to have respondents either claim their cats as owned, or as strays they were feeding, before answering questions regarding alter status and numbers.

Alter rates of owned cats had increased from 86% to 92% and to 93% in San Jose. However the alter rate of un-owned cats being fed by households was a dismal 5%. The total number of unowned cats, and the number of households feeding unowned cats, has dropped dramatically from nearly 41% of the known cat population in 1993, to 28%. However, 79% of these unowned San Jose cats being fed (58,949) are completely unsocial (46,569), and must be trapped to be altered.

This report recommends increasing efforts to trap and alter these unowned and feral cats through intensive public education, and employing the least intrusive or coercive methods possible in order to encourage citizens who are feeding stray cats to alter them. Also recommended is the elimination of current San Jose Animal Care and Services rules restricting the number of feral cats residents can alter, as this is a disincentive to reducing the reproductive capacity of feral cats and extends the municipal costs for handling these cats out for many more years. Further restrictions on the reproduction of owned cats will not significantly affect shelter cat intake numbers.

From a lay summary by Karen Johnson, National Pet Alliance, and Joan Miller, March 2007.