

**The San Mateo County
Community
Animal Task Force
Minority Report**

October 4, 1991

**Reformatted and Reorganized
Typographical and Grammatical Errors Corrected
Animal Count Fiscal Year '89-'90 Added
October 30, 1991**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	
• Why the Task Force was Convened.....	2
• The Problem.....	4
II. THE CASE AGAINST MANDATORY NEUTER AND SPAY	
• Data Analysis.....	9
• Constitutional Issues.....	11
• A Scientific Case Against Mandatory Neuter and Spay for the Dogs of San Mateo County.....	15
• The Humane Issues for Cats of Mandatory Neuter and Spay and Breeder Licensing.	17
III. COMMENTS AND OBJECTIONS TO THE STURLA/NOLAN ORDINANCE.....	
	18
IV. COMMENTS AND OBJECTIONS TO THE MAJORITY REPORT	
• Assumptions and Implications.....	24
• Additional Comments.....	27
V. THE MINORITY REPORT ALTERNATIVES TO THE STURLA/NOLAN ORDINANCE.....	
	32
VI. CONCLUSION.....	39
ADDENDA	
• Rational Solutions	
• Technical Committee Proposals	
• Task Force Minutes	
• Data Analysis: Supporting Calculations	
• Peninsula Humane Society Animal Count Fiscal Year '89-'90	

MINORITY REPORT AT A GLANCE

- **THERE IS A PET POPULATION SURPLUS IN SAN MATEO COUNTY.**
- **AN EXAMINATION OF THE DATA DOES NOT SUPPORT THE NEED FOR MANDATORY NEUTER AND SPAY.**
- **MANDATORY NEUTER AND SPAY IS NOT THE BEST WAY TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM.**
- **THERE ARE SERIOUS FLAWS IN THE STURLA/NOLAN ORDINANCE.**
- **THE TASK FORCE MAJORITY REPORT IS PUNATIVE, REGULATORY AND INCLUDES MANDATORY NEUTER AND SPAY.**
- **THE TASK FORCE MINORITY REPORT IS AN INCENTIVE BASED PROGRAM. IT OFFERS ALTERNATIVES TO MANDATORY NEUTER AND SPAY.**
- **WE URGE THE REPLACEMENT OF THE STURLA/NOLAN ORDINANCE.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Why the Task Force was Convened

We were convened by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors through a series of events which began over two years ago. At that time, the Executive Director of Peninsula Humane Society tried unsuccessfully to get a law passed by the California State Assembly which would have established an indefinite moratorium on the breeding of all dogs and cats in the state.

In August of 1990, a media campaign was planned by Peninsula Humane Society. The campaign was centered around a photo layout of barrels of dead cats and dogs. It was launched on October 23, 1990. On October 25, San Mateo County Supervisor Tom Nolan announced his intent to introduce an ordinance which would ban the breeding of all dogs and cats in the County of San Mateo. On November 13, 1990, the "Sturla/Nolan Ordinance" was introduced. This ordinance called for a one year moratorium on all breeding of dogs and cats, forbade transportation of any dogs or cats for the purposes of breeding, introduced the concept of "zero growth", and called for mandatory neuter or spay of all dogs or cats over the age of nine months after the period of the moratorium. There were no exceptions or provisions for people engaged in planned purposeful breeding programs.

The public response to the introduction of the Sturla/Nolan Ordinance was very emotionally charged -- on both sides. Over 300 people came to a mid-afternoon hearing. The response from the purebred dog and cat fancy, as well as concerned dog and cat owners, was that of outrage.

Some amendments were reluctantly agreed to. The moratorium was shortened, and an exemption for breeders was added to the ordinance. The concept of a Task Force was first voiced at this meeting.

The next hearing, on December 11th, was again attended by hundreds of people representing both sides of the issue. There was major sentiment in favor of tabling any further action. Many felt that a Task Force should study the facts before the passage of such a restrictive and controversial piece of legislation. However, the desire to go on record with a "first of its kind" law appeared to motivate the Supervisors into passing the ordinance anyway. The law that was passed called for the appointment of a Task Force to make recommendations prior to implementation of the ordinance.

On December 18, a second reading put the Sturla/Nolan Ordinance on the books, and a resolution was passed calling for the formation of a broad based Task Force from the community.

The Task Force was convened on March 12, 1991 and began its research and deliberations. The charge of the Task Force contained the following mission statement: Address the pet overpopulation issue with the long range goal of eliminating the euthanasia of unwanted healthy animals. This report is a reflection of what was learned.

The Problem

The world was shocked last October when Peninsula Humane Society took euthanasia out of their back room and into the living rooms of the Bay Area. Pet population became a main topic of discussion.

The San Mateo Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance as a direct result of what the world was told in October 1990. The findings of the ordinance stated "Approximately 10,000 healthy but abandoned dogs and cats are euthanized annually in San Mateo County by the Peninsula Humane Society." The thought was horrifying. The thought of 10,000 killed animals, all healthy and adoptable, brought together people in various animal fields to work on the problem.

The data researched and presented by the Technical Committee of the Animal Task Force shed new light on the picture conjured up by barrels of dead kittens. At the April 3, 1991 meeting of the Technical Committee, the *Peninsula Humane Society Annual Animal Count Report* to San Mateo County was presented for the first time to the general public. This report was never revealed to the press or the Supervisors during the public hearing process prior to the passage of the Sturla/Nolan Ordinance. The Board of Supervisors and, indeed, the world, decided on the need for an invasive law on the basis of stated opinion from "expert" testimony that has never been substantiated by facts. Kim Sturla, the then Executive Director of Peninsula Humane Society, and members of its Board gave public testimony that the citizens of San Mateo County were responsible for the deaths of 10,000 'HEALTHY' animals.

On the basis of this emotionally charged number and the pleas of a horrified but uninformed public, the shelter Director and staff demanded a law be enacted with the stated goal of ending euthanasia of animals in San Mateo County, along with zero population growth.

The Animal Count Report for Fiscal Year 1989-1990 (the statistical year used for the ordinance findings) showed that the total number of dogs and cats euthanized was:

$$\begin{array}{r} 1738 \text{ dogs} \\ + \underline{7300 \text{ cats}} \\ \hline 9038 \text{ total animals} \end{array}$$

There were two euthanasia categories listed on the report: 'Euthanized

Unadoptable' and 'Euthanized Unwanted'. There has often been confusion about what these two categories meant and how overpopulation should be defined.

In an address given at the American Humane Association National Training Conference, on September 14, 1991 in Denver Colorado, the new Executive Director of Peninsula Humane Society, Leon Nielsen, stated:

"Because animals that are injured, sick, very old or have certain incorrigible behavior problems, for example aggression, that will make them dangerous or unsuitable as companion animals, will continue to be brought to animal shelters, there will always be a need for euthanasia. It's important to distinguish between these animals which could not responsibly be placed as companion animals, and those healthy adoptable animals for which no suitable homes could be found. Only the latter constitutes surplus, or pet overpopulation animals. Humane societies and animal control agencies that accept all animals will always be charged with the responsibility of making this distinction. It would, therefore, not be realistic for a community based humane society or municipal animal control agency to formulate a goal or mission statement or develop a program with the stated purpose of eliminating euthanasia from its operation...The paramount purpose of any animal protection agency is to alleviate or prevent suffering, and euthanasia is a necessary element of this effort."

Using the above definition, the data supplied by the Animal Count Report provided a clearer focus on the problem the Task Force was asked to address. Of the 1738 dogs euthanized:

1470 were classified unadoptable
268 were classified unwanted

Of the 7300 cats euthanized:

6500 were classified unadoptable
800 were classified unwanted

Combining the two unwanted categories:

268 unwanted dogs euthanized
800 unwanted cats euthanized
1068 unwanted dogs and cats were euthanized

By applying Mr. Nielsen's definition to this data, the pet overpopulation

problem in San Mateo County came into clearer view. See Chart A.

Another of the compelling arguments utilized for passage of the ordinance was that this was a GROWING NATIONAL PROBLEM. Reports gathered by the Technical Committee from several national humane organizations did not support this claim. See the American Humane Association data in Chart B.

In view of this information, we concluded that:

- There is a pet surplus problem in San Mateo County that is being dealt with by the euthanasia of healthy animals. However, the extent of the problem had been overstated tenfold.
- One of the main points we all agreed on as members of the Task Force was that the euthanasia of even ONE healthy dog or cat was regrettable, and we all wanted to develop and implement effective ways to end this unnecessary killing.

Therefore, using an exaggerated and emotionally unsubstantiated number was not necessary. The truth would have served just as well.

We also believed that if we developed programs to reduce the number of unwanted animals being euthanized, the number of unadoptable animals being euthanized would also decline.

Two other noticeable pieces of information (See Chart C) helped to further define the problem:

- There are substantially more cats being brought into the shelter and being euthanized than dogs.
- A very small part of the total number of animals handled came from the unincorporated part of San Mateo County.

Additionally:

- Most of the cats that ended up at the shelter were classified as unsuitable for adoption. They were most likely unsocialized, unowned cats.
- Many of the dogs and cats handled at the shelter are teenaged or older. One of the major reasons for surrender of dogs is for behavior problems. There are very few puppies handled by the shelter.
- There are changing community demographics that need to be considered.

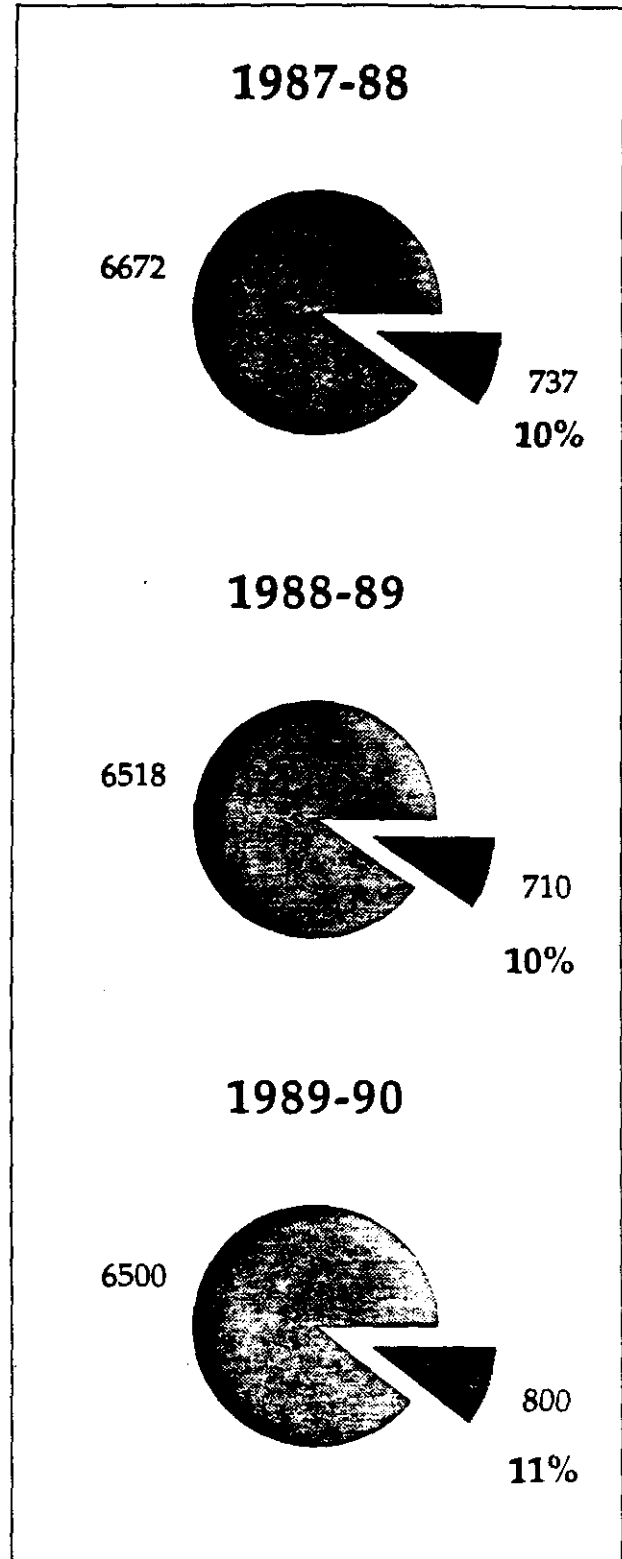
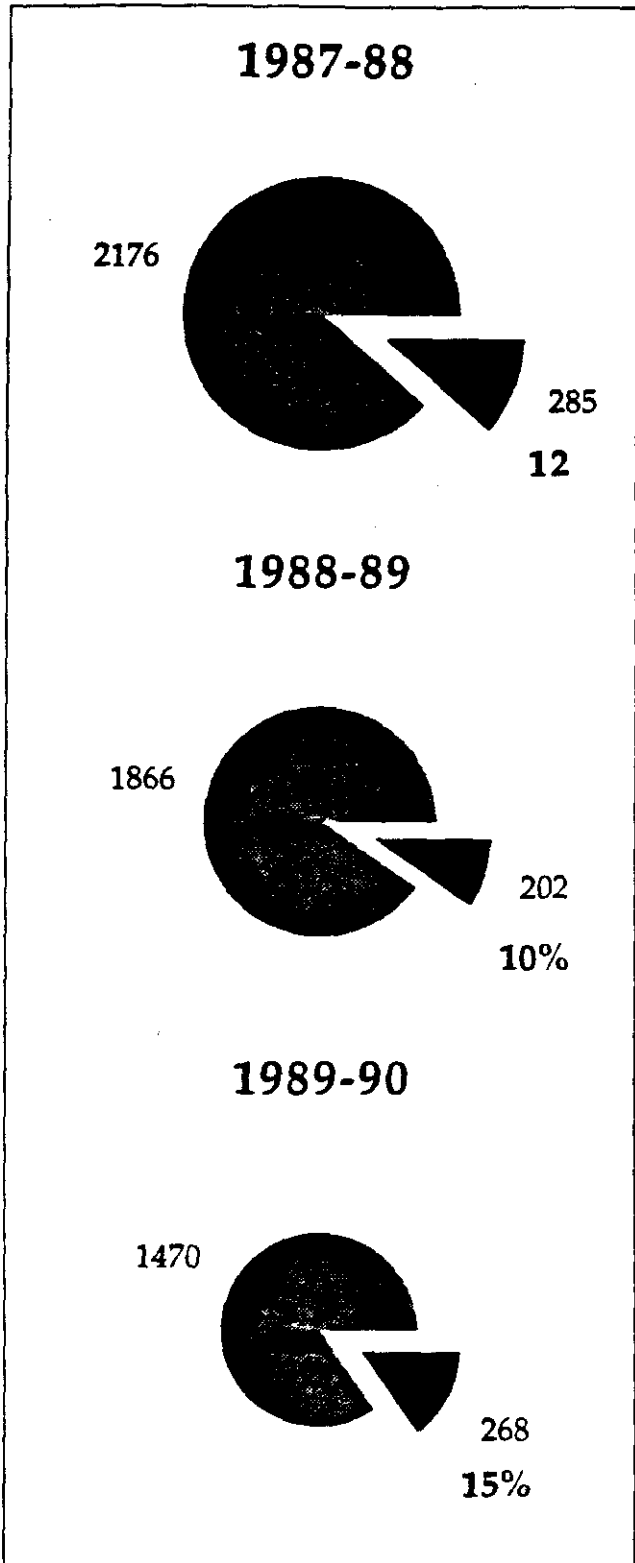
A problem that was simplistically but emotionally described in October of 1990 revealed itself to be multi-faceted and complex. We came to believe

that **THERE IS NO ONE SOLUTION TO THE PET POPULATION PROBLEM.** Resolution of the problem will require an integrated and interrelated set of multi-dimensional programs.

We came to the firm conclusion that the overall magnitude of this problem in San Mateo County did not justify the need for coercive legislation.

All of us came to the Task Force with different experiences, differing points of view, and strongly held beliefs. All of us learned from one another. We did not reach consensus on all points. But, we all did have unity on one key point: **THE PROBLEM IS WORTH SOLVING.**

CHART A



■ Dogs Euthanized for Health, Age or Behavior Problems
 ■ Unwanted Dogs Euthanized

■ Cats Euthanized for Health, Age or Behavior Problems
 ■ Unwanted Cats Euthanized

The majority of the animals euthanized in San Mateo County are killed because they are unadoptable.

AMERICAN HUMANE
ANIMAL SHELTER REPORTING STUDY : 1988

by
Roger Nassar, Ph.D
and
John Flake

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Figure 1 is a comparison of the change over the period 1985 to 1988 for the Shelter entry estimates provided by this study. Figure 2 displays the change in euthanasia exit estimates for the period 1985 to 1988. Figures 1 and 2 appear to depict a steady decline in the overall numbers of animals entering and exiting shelters.

FIGURE 1

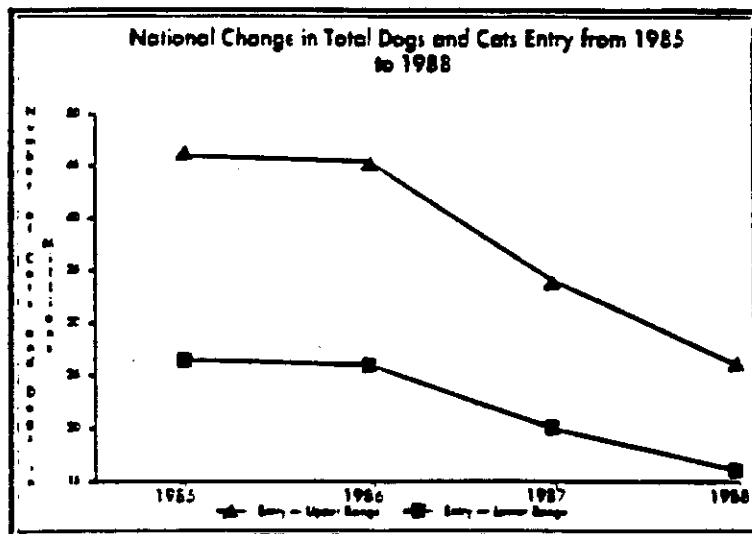
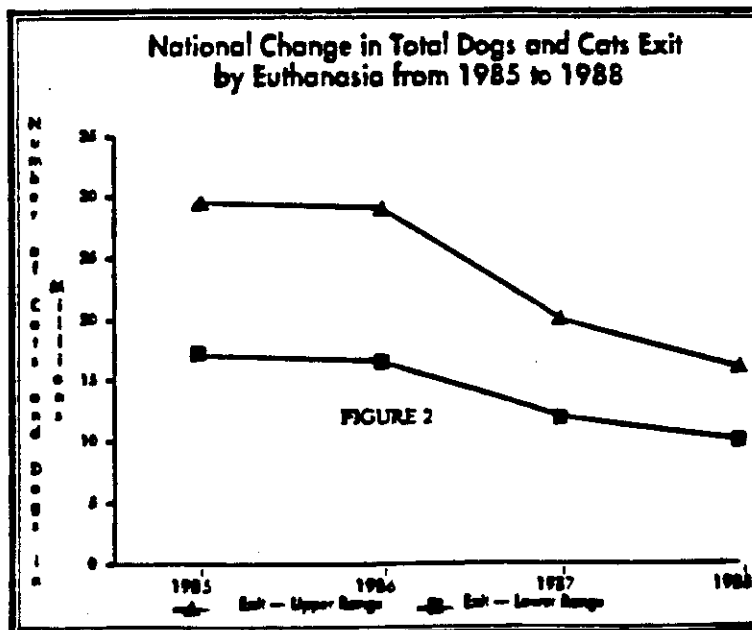
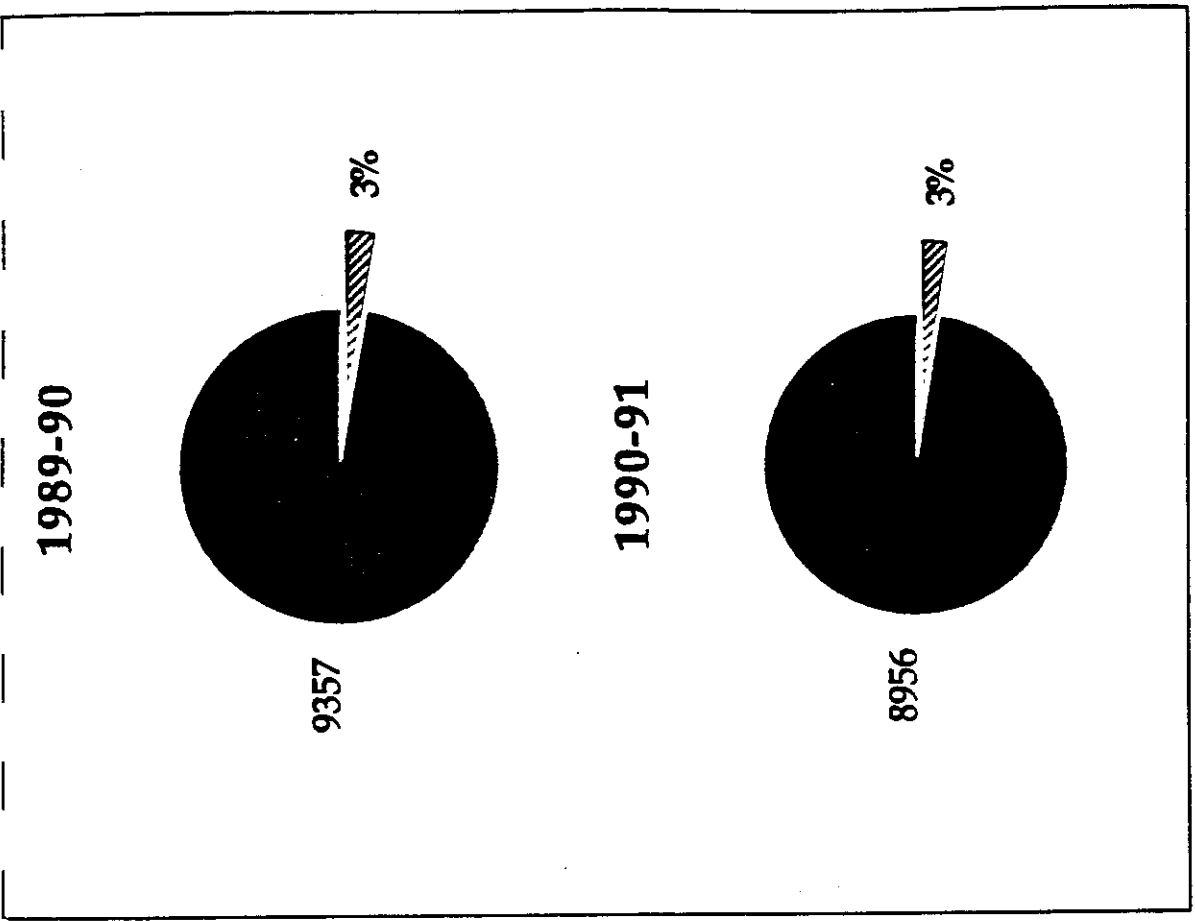
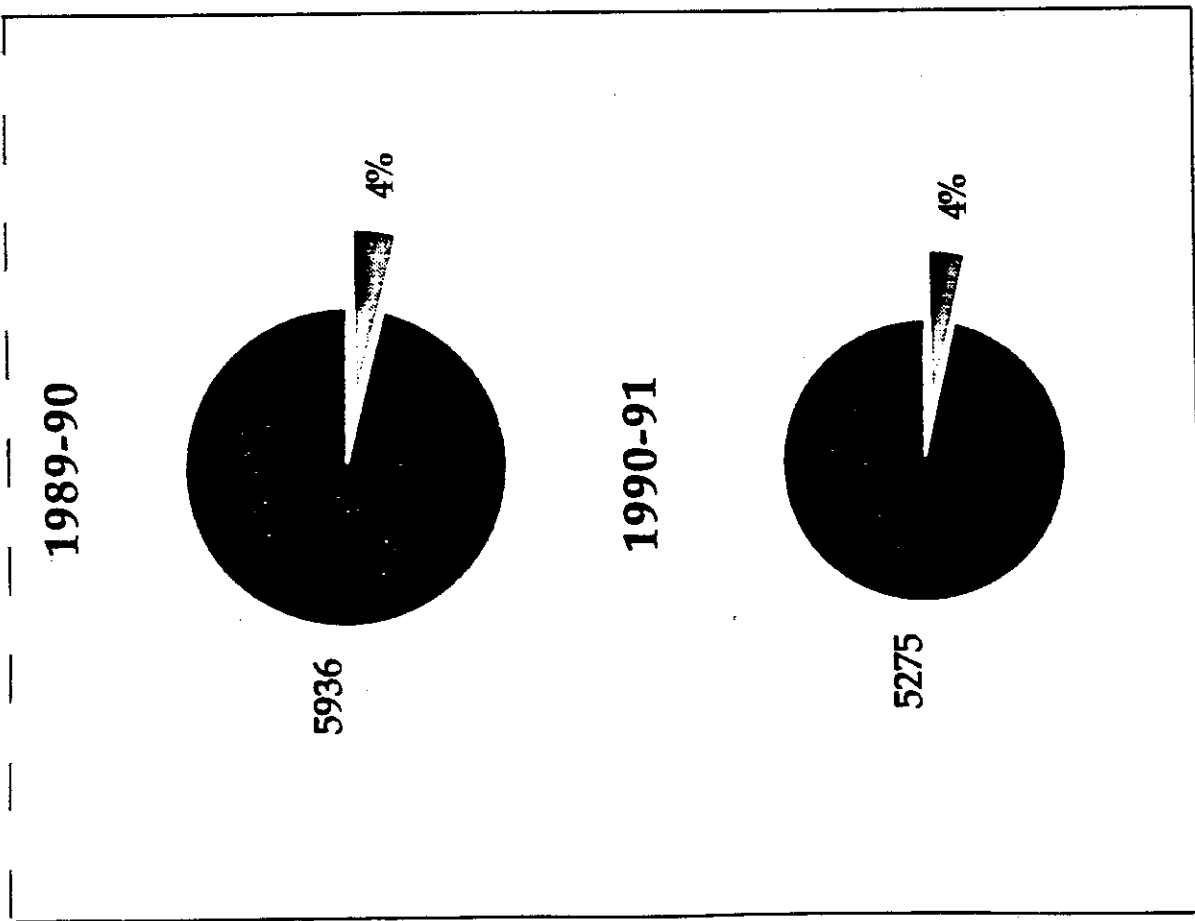
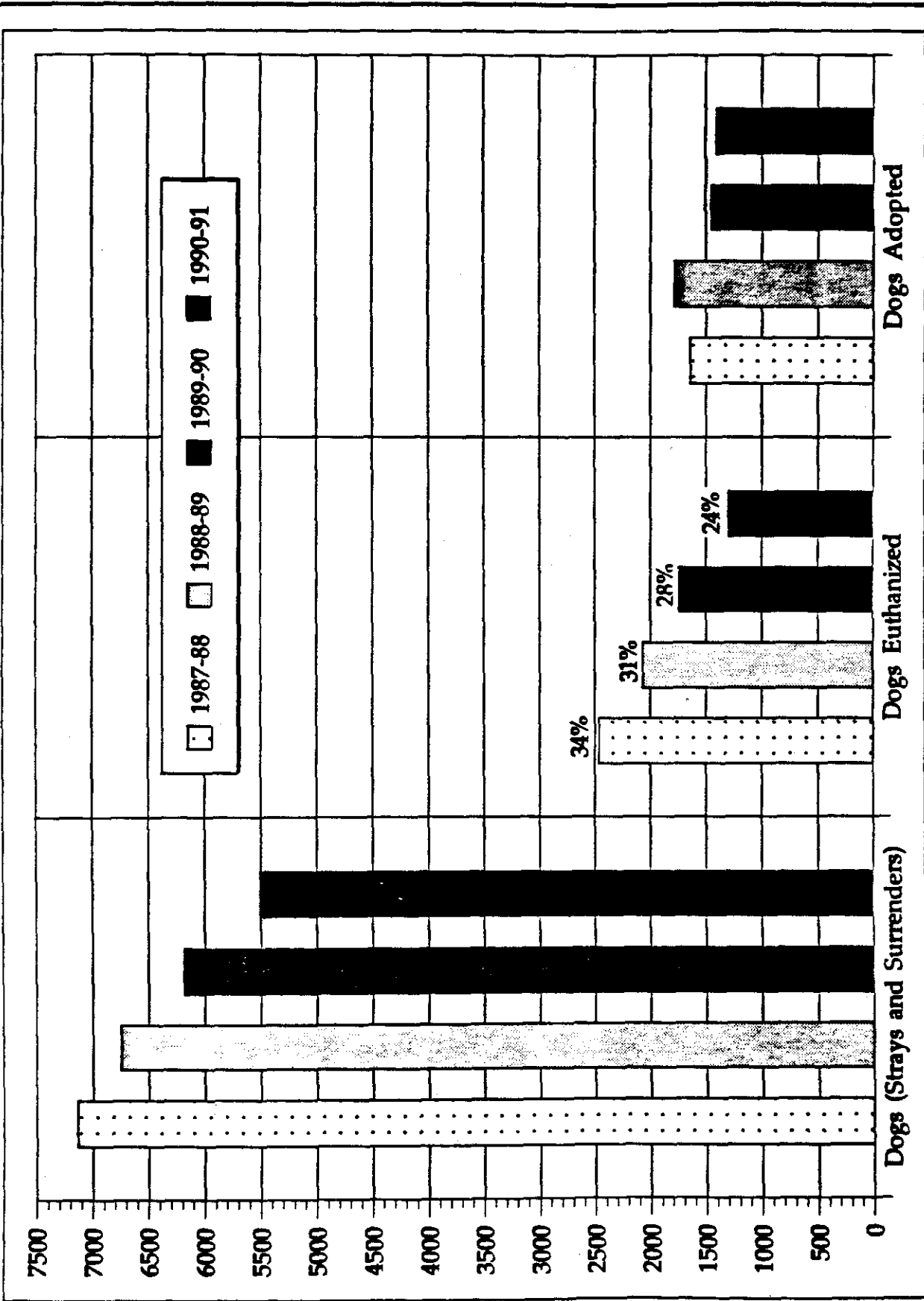


FIGURE 2

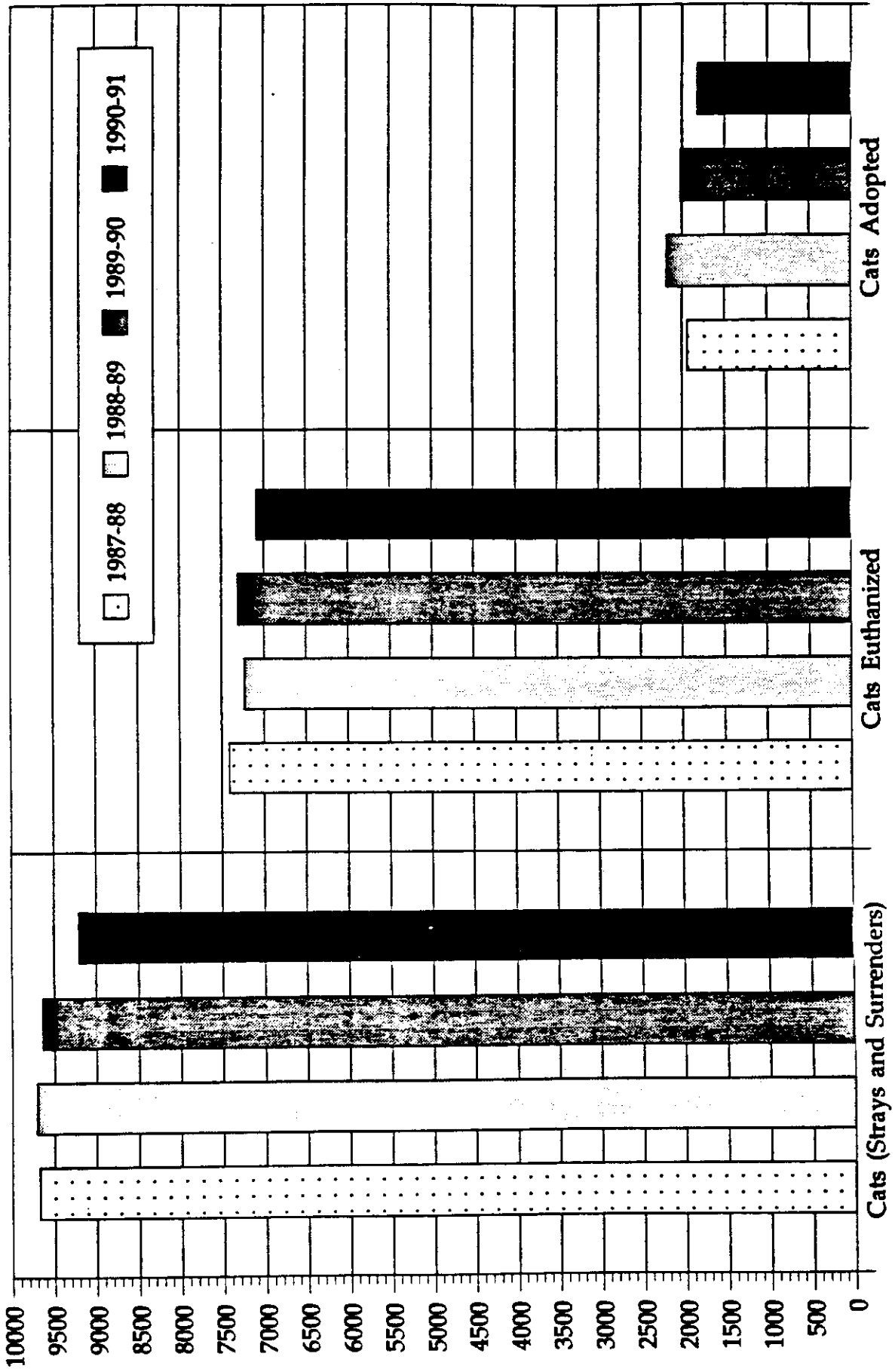




Changing the Animal Control Policies in the Unincorporated parts of San Mateo County will not materially effect the majority of the animals handled by San Mateo Animal Control and will unfairly tax the residents of the unincorporated part of the county.



Euthanasia in San Mateo has already decreased,
but the number of dogs adopted has remained constant.



The number of cats handled by San Mateo Animal Control is not increasing.