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## PREFERENCES OF COMMERCIAL DOG BREEDERS IN CENTRAL KERALA<sup>#</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This study characterises the preferences of commercial dog breeders in central Kerala. Commercial dog breeding is a promising business that has the potential to eliminate youth unemployment and serve as a means of livelihood. However, the state lacks reliable details on the preferences of commercial dog breeders involved in this vocation across various aspects of dog breeding. In light of these facts, the present study was conducted to identify the preferences of commercial dog breeders in central Kerala. The study was conducted following retrospective research design in sixty commercial dog breeding ventures randomly selected from Thrissur and Ernakulam districts of Kerala. Data collection was done by personal interviews using a structured pre tested interview schedule. The findings of study

indicated that majority of the commercial dog breeders preferred to rear large to giant breeds. Despite a strong preference for large to medium size breeds, the Beagle was the breed that was mostly reared followed by the Labrador Retriever. Majority of the breeders reported a strong preference for rearing male dogs. In terms of the preferred location of the kennel, most of the breeders preferred to rear the dogs on the same compound that their residence was located on. Majority of these enterprises were located in urban areas. The present study threw light on the general preferences of the commercial dog breeders of Kerala, which would serve as a benchmark for further diversified research in this sector.

**Keywords:** Breed diversification, Ownership, Marketing, Credit source

## **INTRODUCTION**

Animals have contributed a lot to mankind from time immemorial providing food, income, recreation, assistance and companionship. Humans quickly realised that instead of fearing, killing and eating them, these animals could be put into far more advantageous tasks like hunting, guarding, and breeding. Domesticated dogs have evolved into distinct sorts, or groupings, over millennia, such as companion dogs, guard dogs, hunting dogs and sighthounds. To ensure these distinctions, man has purposefully bred canines with specific characteristics in order to encourage those characteristics in their offspring. Hundreds of dog breeds have been created as a result of this procedure.

As per the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Dog Breeding and Marketing) Rules, 2017, a breeder is “an individual or group of persons who own dogs of specific breeds for breeding and sale of dogs and pups, and includes boarding kennel operator, intermediate handler and trader”. Before purchasing a puppy, it is important to learn about the breeder’s preferences along with the characteristics of the breeding facility, because early experiences can have a long-term impact on the dog’s behaviour. Various studies have collected data on dog breeders (e.g., number of breeders per breed, number of active breeders, number

of litters produced per year, number of puppies produced), but the data does not include the breeders’ breeding priorities and choices. This knowledge gap also extends to the scientific literature, with little known about the preferences and choices of commercial dog breeders. This type of information is critical for improving breeding procedures and ensuring that dogs have the best possible health and behaviour. Unfortunately, our knowledge of what matters to dog breeders when choosing their dogs, particularly the breeders’ preferences and choices, is inadequate. It is the role of the scientific community and professionals to support the system. In light of this, the current study looked into commercial dog breeders’ preferences and choices in the Thrissur and Ernakulam districts of Kerala.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Two districts, Thrissur and Ernakulam, were specifically chosen to research the commercial dog breeding operations in central Kerala because they contained the highest number of purebred dog litters recognised by the Kennel Club of India. Separate sampling frames were constructed for each of these two districts. Sampling frames were prepared by Key Informant Technique. Veterinarians, Kennel Club of India members and commercial dog breeders were identified as the key

informants. A total of 60 commercial dog breeders were chosen at random, so as to include 30 from Thrissur and 30 from Ernakulam districts. The collection of data was done using a structured pretested interview schedule along with direct non participant observation so as to ensure the reliability of data. The data were analysed using appropriate statistical methods.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Preference for size of dog**

In the present study, half of the commercial dog breeders studied, preferred large sized dog breeds, 20 per cent preferred medium dog breeds, 11.66 per cent preferred small dog breeds and 18.33 per cent preferred to raise giant dog breeds (Table 1). Breeds having a high prolificacy rate should be used to increase production efficiency. Breeds with bigger litter sizes have been reported to have higher production efficiency, which is connected to breed size. Litter size is larger in large and giant breeds when compared to small breeds. Research indicates that larger dog breeds, such as large and giant breeds,

tend to have bigger litter sizes, which can impact production efficiency (Alonge *et al.*, 2016) The commercial dog breeding industry will be more fruitful if large and giant-sized breeds are bred with large litter sizes. However, Pirrone *et al.* (2015) in a study in Italy reported that dogs of medium size were substantially more frequent (39 per cent) when compared to both small and large-sized dogs (29 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively).

**Sex preference**

The results of the present study indicated that 46.70 per cent of the respondents preferred to keep male dogs whereas 35 per cent preferred to keep female dogs and 18.30 per cent preferred to keep both male and female dogs. It may be due to the fact that male dogs were perceived as being a lot easier to care for and maintain when compared to female dogs since pre and post whelping management in bitches entails a lot of labour and stress. Similar observations were made by Moliya (2019) in the finding that majority of the dog owners in Gujarat preferred to keep male dogs and majority reared other animals at their home.

**Table 1.** Distribution of commercial dog breeders based on type of dog preferred n=60

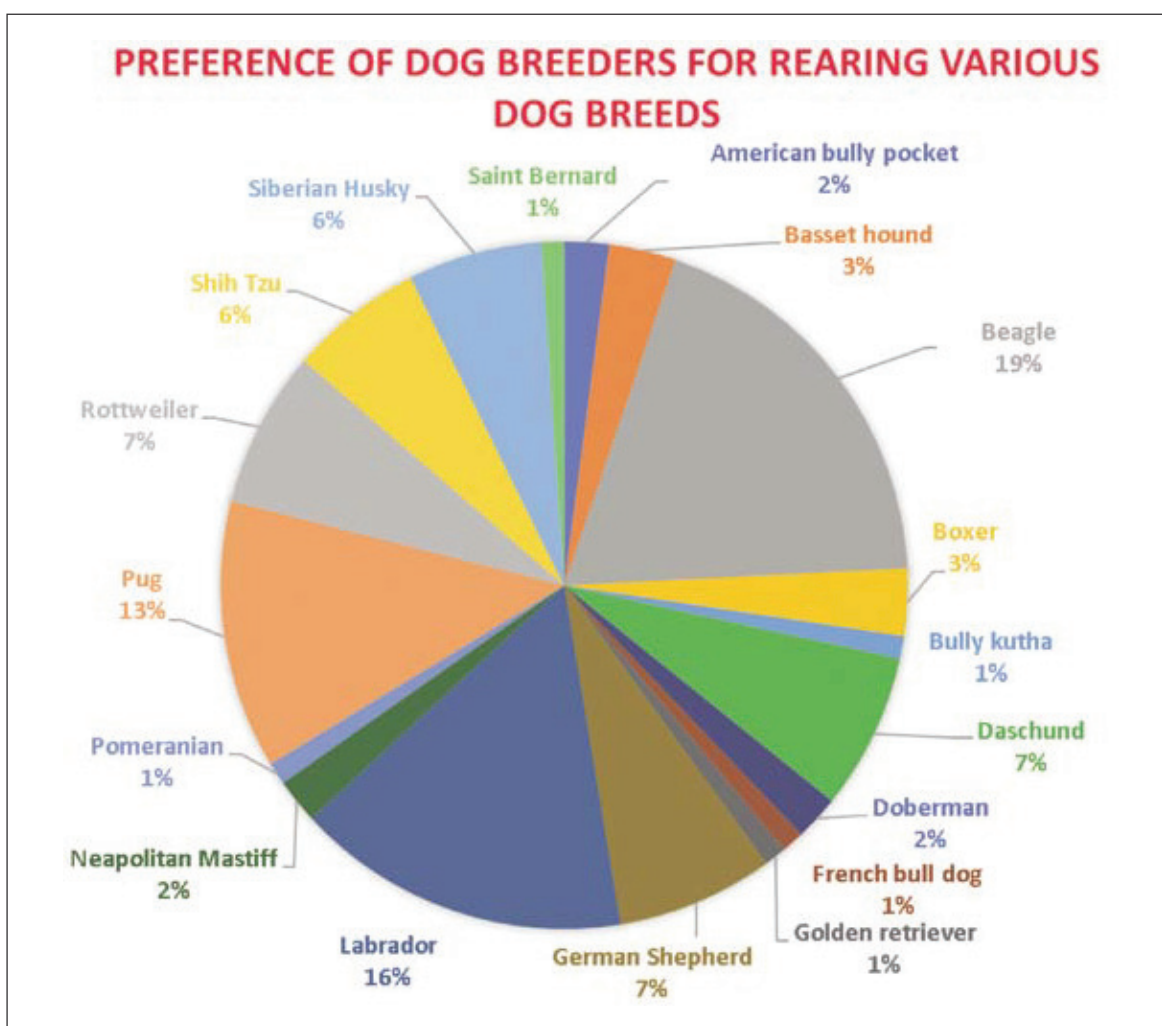
Sl. No	Category	Body weight in kg	Frequency	Per cent
1	Small size breeds	6.6 - <9	7	11.60
2	Medium sized breeds	9 - < 15	12	20.00
3	Large sized breeds	15 - < 30	30	50.00
4	Giant breeds	>30	11	18.33
	<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

However, Santos *et al.* (2021) reported that majority of the commercial dog breeding kennels in United States reared female dogs. This could be because of the higher returns that are forthcoming on female dog rearing enterprises. Moreover, the less aggressive disposition of female dogs coupled with their attachment to owners could have contributed to this finding.

**Breeds reared**

Despite a strong preference for

large to medium size breeds, Beagles were the most reared breed among the commercial dog breeders in Kerala (50 per cent) followed by Labrador (25 per cent), Pug (20 per cent), Daschund, German Shepherd and Rottweiler (11.67 per cent each), Basset hound and Boxer (5 per cent each), American bully pocket, Doberman, Neapolitan Mastiff (3.33 per cent each). However, very few (1.67 per cent) breeders preferred to rear the Bully kutha, French bull dog and Golden retriever.



**Animal diversification on the commercial dog breeding enterprises**

In terms of animal diversification, majority (88.33 per cent) of the commercial dog breeders of Kerala, preferred to keep dogs along with other animals. Animal diversification in kennels provides a great opportunity it terms of socialization experiences for the animals. Animal diversification in kennels offers a valuable opportunity for socialization experiences, benefiting the welfare of dogs in commercial breeding kennels (Pritchett *et al.*, 2021). Enrichment activities, regardless of type, have been shown to impact the behaviour of kennelled dogs positively, with some effects varying based on individual needs and sex of the dogs (Kiddie *et al.*, 2017). Improving the behavioural well-being of dogs in kennels is crucial for both the animal wellbeing and the management techniques employed by breeders. When it comes to stress and illnesses, fear is a major problem among dogs kept in cages. The findings of the present study are explicitly suggestive of the favorable impact made in this direction. Similar findings were reported by Moliya

(2019) that majority of the dog owners in Gujarat had dog and other animals at their homes.

**Type of diet preferred**

Most of the breeders (61.66 per cent) preferred to feed home prepared diets over commercial diets (8.33 percent) to adult and growing animals; this could be because of the higher cost of commercially available diets, only 8.33 percent fed their dogs a complete commercial diet. Correct knowledge of the quality and quantity of food to be fed is the key to ensure the health of animals reared in addition to profitability of the firm; as the major cost incurred on the venture was the cost of feed. Extension support system and communication between veterinarians and commercial dog breeders seems to be highly essential to improve feeding practices as the complexity in diet preparation can be a difficulty in the adoption of improved canine feeding practices. Connolly *et al.* (2014) conducted a study among the dog breeders of United States and Canada reported that dog breeder trust in all sources of nutrition information

**Table 2.** Distribution of commercial dog breeders based on type of diet preferred

Sl. No.	Diet	Frequency	Percentage
1	Home prepared diet	37	61.66
2	Commercial diet	5	8.33
3	Mixed diet	18	30.00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3.** Distribution of commercial dog breeders based on method of rearing dogs n=60

Sl. No	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	Within house/apartment	8	13.33
2	Top of house	12	20.00
3	Same compound	30	50.00
4	Different compound	10	16.67

was substantially linked with the type of diet supplied by the breeder (home-prepared vs commercial). The authors also reported that although veterinarians were considered as a trustworthy source for information regarding nutrition of dogs only less than half of the commercial dog breeders consulted them for dog nutrition.

**Method of rearing**

Half of the respondents kept their animals on kennels within the compound housing their homes itself. Twenty per cent reared animals on top of their homes while 13.33 per cent of the respondents kept

animals inside their houses or apartments. The results of the present study also shed light on the fact that 16.67 per cent of commercial dog breeders preferred to have their kennels at a different location away from their homes. Barrera *et al.* (2011) reported that the environment of the shelter influenced the interaction between canines and humans.

**Type of ownership**

Type of ownership refers to the nature of ownership pattern of the kennel. Data in Table 4 revealed that majority of the respondents were sole proprietors (68.33

**Table 4.** Distribution of commercial dog breeders based on type of ownership

Sl. No	Category	Frequency	Percent
1.	Sole proprietorship	41	68.33
2	Partnership	19	31.66
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 5.** Distribution of commercial dog breeders based on source of information regarding dog breeding

Sl. No	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	Own experiences	20	33.33
2	Other breeders	25	41.67
3	Veterinarians	10	16.67
4	Books	5	8.30
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

per cent) whereas, 31.66 per cent had a partnership type of business. According to Cleaveland *et al.* (2003), partnering dog breeders with professionals' veterinarians in the dog breeding sector is a healthy development that benefits both the dogs, dog breeders, and the general community. Ishola (2016) claimed that the dog breeding industry may help lower unemployment rates among youngsters, particularly freshly graduated veterinarians and described how a dog breeding business may be started and maintained with little money.

**Source of information**

It could be observed from Table 5 that nearly half of the respondents got information regarding dog breeding from other breeders (41.67 per cent), while, 33.33 per cent respondents considered their own experiences as a source of information. Veterinarians were considered as a source of information by only 16.67 per cent and only 8.30 per cent considered books as sources of information regarding dog breeding and management. Despite the fact that

veterinarians are considered as authentic sources of information in dog breeding and management, only few breeders depended on them as source of information. It shows that veterinarians should become more proactive in technology transfer to commercial dog breeders and design training programs that could help commercial dog breeders to enhance the financial viability of their enterprises through scientific dog management. Pirrone *et al.* (2015) in a study in Italy found that majority (55 per cent) of the respondents rated the "self" highly as a source of information for dog breeding and management practices whereas 42 per cent reported the Web, the television, or a book.

**Marketing method**

It is evident from Table 6 that majority (63.33) of the respondents preferred to use the online or social media platforms for the sale and marketing of their animals and puppies. Direct sale of puppies to pet parents was done by 16.67 per cent. Marketing via pet shops and breeders was

**Table 6:** Distribution of commercial dog breeders based on marketing method used

Sl. No	Category	Frequency	Per cent
1	Direct	10	16.67
2	Online / Social media platforms	38	63.33
3	Pet shops	5	8.33
4	Breeders	5	8.33
5	Agents or Middle men	2	3.33
		60	100.00

preferred by 8.33 per cent each and only 3.33 per cent of the studied breeders relied on agents or middle men for the sale of puppies and animals they reared. A proper market study regarding the customer preferences and choices of breeds would also improve the outcome of business. The findings above are in consensus with Angeloni *et al.* (2021) who found that digital marketing provided wide variety of alternatives to merchandise globally and generate profits.

**Credit source**

Majority (58.33 per cent) of the respondents reported that they preferred to use their own money along with money that had been borrowed from friends and family to run the dog breeding units. It was also evident that twenty-five per cent of the respondents reported that they always preferred to use their own money on the commercial dog breeding enterprise. None of the respondents reported availing any loan from formal credit institutions. If commercial dog breeders could mobilise more funds from formal credit institutions, they could carry out their business in a

better way. Similar results were reported by Lawal (2016), Lavanya *et al.* (2017), Lizote *et al.* (2017) and Lalremruati (2019) who reported that farmers faced difficulties in obtaining loan from financial institutions. Tsiouni *et al.* (2021) said that agricultural policy and farm economics are required for farms to be commercially and financially viable.

**SUMMARY**

The present study analysed the preferences and practices of commercial dog breeders of central Kerala, regarding their preferred size, sex, breed of dog that they rear along with their preferences regarding the type of diet fed, animal diversification and method of rearing. Using the key informants’ technique, 60 commercial dog breeding units were randomly selected, 30 from Thrissur and 30 from Ernakulam districts in Kerala state. Half of all commercial dog breeders preferred to rear large sized dogs followed by medium and giant-sized dogs. Most of them reared dogs and other animals in their premises. Male dogs were preferred more than female dogs. Beagle was the most

**Table 7:** Distribution of commercial dog breeders based on credit source

Sl. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Own money	25	41.66
2.	Own money combined with money borrowed from friends and family members	35	58.33
	Total	60	100.00



reared dog breed followed by Labrador Retriever. In terms of diet, the majority of them preferred home-cooked meals over commercially prepared diets, and half of the respondents maintained their animals in their own housing tract. The findings of this study offer practical insights for policymakers and new breeders in Kerala. Policymakers can design support programs focusing on financial assistance, training, and marketing strategies, especially since breeders rarely access formal credit. This highlights the need for accessible credit facilities to help scale operations. Veterinarians should play a more proactive role in educating breeders through training programs to enhance breeding practices and financial viability. Additionally, new breeders can benefit from understanding customer preferences, particularly the use of online platforms for marketing. By aligning breeding practices with market demand and improving access to financial resources, the commercial dog breeding industry in Kerala has significant potential for growth and development. The current study will serve as a baseline for future multidisciplinary research in this field.

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