



IN SESSION

AKC'S CONGRESSIONAL NEWSLETTER

The American Kennel Club's Newsletter for Members of Congress and their Staff

PERSPECTIVES

*We're more than champion dogs...
We're the dog's champion.*

Protecting Pet and Public Health Through the Farm Bill

When most people think about the Farm Bill, they consider issues such as SNAP, livestock, row crops and even food security. But did you know that it's also one of the most significant bills to impact animal welfare and pet health?

This is because the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service administers the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The landmark act, first known as the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act signed into law by Lyndon Johnson in 1966, following a tragedy in which a beloved family dog was stolen from a Pennsylvania farm and sold to a testing laboratory. The AWA established licensing for commercial animal dealers, and regulatory oversight for transport, sale, and handling of non-livestock species including dogs cats, hamsters and non-human primates.

In the 60 years since passage of that measure, the AWA has expanded and evolved continuously to reflect new knowledge in

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Congressional Spotlight Congressman Glenn 'GT' Thompson (PA-15)



Congressman Thompson and Buddy

Community Service has been part of Congressman Glenn "GT" Thompson's life for as long as he can remember. Achieving Eagle Scout and receiving the National Distinguished Eagle Scout Award in 2012 are a start to understanding his commitment to helping his community—including the members with four legs. Growing up on the outskirts of Howard, PA just outside of town, stray dogs and cats would regularly seek safety at the Thompson house where they could find food, shelter, and love. Some of Representative Thompson's favorite childhood memories include Sandy, a Collie mix, and Tuffy, the tail-less cat.

Thompson has carried this love for animals throughout his life. After having children, he and his wife Penny had their kids select a puppy from their local SPCA. They picked (and named Truman, a Border Collie/German Shepherd mix. During his 15 years, Truman wove his way into the fabric of the family. He loved trips to Washington, D.C., always finding the best spot in the car and in Congressman's office (where the bathroom tiled floor provided the perfect amount of cooling!). When in the office he

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science, animal husbandry and animal welfare. Today the AWA provides safeguards against animal fighting, protections for animals in transit, and oversight for commercial kennels.

Every Farm Bill in the last generation has carried language to amend the Animal Welfare Act's broad mandate. This year's bill is no different. Some language in the Farm Bill will clearly advance the science, health and wellbeing of animals, while others are of concern due to overly broad baseline assumptions or unintended consequences.

In this issue of In Session, we invite you to learn more about and support initiatives to protect pet and public health by ensuring verification that dogs imported into the United States are in good health; microchipped; has received all necessary vaccination and parasite treatments, demonstrated negative test results, and has a health certificate from an accredited veterinarian. These simple requirements will go a long way in fighting zoonotic disease that impacts both human and animal health. Measures to expand detection dog training to protect agriculture and national safety, and measures that allow victims of domestic violence to shelter safely with a pet are

strongly supported by AKC.

Similarly, we urge caution on other measures that establish harmful, non-scientific one-size-fits-all care regimens that undermine canine care or efforts undermine the authority of the USDA to properly regulate educate and enforce important commercial animal businesses.

Visit page 4 for AKC's letter to Congress on the Senate Farm Bill, and pages 1 and 3 to learn more about House Agriculture Chairman GT Thompson, the architect of this year's House Farm Bill.

All the best,



Sheila Goffe

Executive Secretary & VP Government Relations

TOUCHDOWN, CANINES! *NFL PLAYERS & DOGS PRESENTED BY THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB TO PREMIERE ON ESPN2*



Courtesy NFL

Tune in for Episode 1 'NFL Players & Dogs: Life Off the Field' to Air at 8pm ET on 9/15!

Explore the special bond between Philadelphia Eagles linebacker Zack Baun, Dallas Cowboys cornerback Josh Butler, Kansas City Chiefs defensive end George Karlaftis, New Orleans Saints quarterback Tyler Shough and more and their beloved four-legged friends.



would welcome any visitors, and if Penny were in the office, he was her protector and would add “screening” visitors to his list of duties. Truman loved life and happily adapted as needed for every new adventure.

After Truman died, the family waited a few years before adding another dog to the family. The right dog had to love to travel and meet new people. How could a dog ever compare to Truman?

At last, Congressman Thompson’s wife and sister took plans into their own hands. Under the guise of visiting his Aunt Bea in Lebanon County, PA, they packed the Congressman into the car and instead drove him to a breeder. Representative Thompson laughed and exclaimed he had been “got!” He never did visit his aunt that day, but he did find his perfect puppy.

After six hours of research on the best names for Golden Retrievers, Rep. Thompson kept coming back to the idea that anytime he met a dog he always greeted them by saying “Hey, Buddy!” A “Buddy” would never meet a stranger. Buddy is now a happy energetic 7-month-old puppy who has happily visited the DC office and can’t wait for more trips.

True to his name, Buddy and gets so excited when a visitor arrives



or family returns that he covers them with kisses. When not giving out kisses, Buddy likes to spend time collecting rocks. The back patio holds his collection box -- (“And don’t even try to remove them, says Thompson – “he takes his job as rock collector very seriously”! He is also very particular about eating ice cream. Representative Thompson says he must hold the cone for Buddy to lick the ice cream out and then break up the cone for Buddy to eat.

As a lifelong dog owner, Chairman Thompson knows what traits to look for in a responsible dog owner and what to prioritize in legislation impacting dogs. “One must follow and know the laws and most importantly meet the needs of one’s pet.” He says.. “Whether a dog is a companion, hunting, or detection dog, a responsible owner will meet the needs of that dog and the role they play.”

“Dogs enjoy their role and thrive when they are allowed to fulfill that role.” A great example of this, says Thompson, is USDA’s Beagle Brigade. The Beagle Brigade is a team of dogs trained to inspect U.S. airports for prohibited agricultural items. These detector dogs undergo 13 weeks of rigorous training before the USDA deploys them. “The beagle brigade handlers work with them every day. They (The Beagle Brigade) are vital in detecting pests and diseases coming into the USA.”

Passage of the House Farm Bill (HR.7567) in late April was a highlight of the Chairman’s year.. “I’m very proud of what we put into the Farm Bill. There are positive provisions outlining breeder licensing and oversight under the Animal Welfare Act, expansions for USDA reviews and reports, appropriations of training facilities for detection dog programs, and the Healthy Dog Importation Act.”

He noted that misconceptions about the role of breeders and farmers in society that lead people to believe that responsible dog owners and farmers don’t want accountability often exacerbate issues surrounding animal welfare.

“We have a responsibility to share that we do have standards and not to judge the industry as a whole,” Thompson explained. “The outliers are outliers. Those who violate those standards should face consequences.”

“The House passed Farm Bill upholds those responsibilities and allows the USDA to use the expertise within the agency to enforce the regulations and the Animal Welfare Act. Further, these training facilities will greatly help support the need for American-bred detection dogs. The Beagle Brigade are “four-legged working professionals” and they play a crucial role in protecting our “food security and national security.”

Did You Know?

- The Golden Retriever originated in Scotland during the 1800s
- Goldens are eager-to-please family dogs.
- The Golden Retriever is third most popular dog breed in the United States (2025)

American Kennel Club Support for The Agriculture Act of 2026 – Farm Bill 2.0 Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry

As the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Chairman prepares to markup up Farm Bill 2.0 the American Kennel Club (AKC) is pleased to reiterate strong support for the animal provisions included in Farm Bill 2.0. The Senate's bill shares numerous positive AKC priorities with the recently-passed House Farm Bill (H.R. 7567, the Farm, Food, & National Security Act of 2026), reauthorizes key U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs, and serves as an important vehicle to address priorities in the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

I am reaching out to you on behalf of the AKC, our more than 5,000 community-based dog clubs, and millions of responsible dog owners and enthusiasts throughout America, to express support for animal care enhancements included Title XII of the Senate Farm Bill 2.0. I also want to alert you to potential amendments pushed by animal extremist groups that will restrict responsible breeding and dog ownership.

Specifically, the AKC supports the following positive Farm Bill 2.0 animal care provisions and urges the Senate Agriculture Committee to advance these positive initiatives without amendment.

- **Section 12502 – Importation of Live Dogs – Healthy Dog Importation Act** – Expands USDA's electronic health documentation requirements for pets entering the United States to protect pet, livestock and public health. This reflects language in the Healthy Dog Importation Act (H.R. 3349/ S. 1725) by requiring electronic records documentation on dogs prior to their importation that verifies the dog is in good health; microchipped; has received all necessary vaccination and parasite treatments, demonstrated negative test results, and has a health certificate from an accredited veterinarian; and in the case of a dog intended for transfer, is at least 6 months old. Exceptions are provided for dogs that are personal pets

of United States origin returning to the United States; United States military working dogs; for research purposes; and dogs coming to the United States solely for veterinary treatment; among several others.

- **Section 12501 – Protecting Animals with Shelter** – Reauthorizes funding for transitional shelters that allow victims of domestic violence to seek safety without leaving their pets behind.
- **Section 12105 – Beagle Brigade Act of 2023** – Authorizes the USDA National Detector Dog Training Center to establish additional training facilities to prepare specially selected dogs and their handlers to detect invasive pests and diseases that threaten American agriculture.

While AKC strongly supports these positive animal welfare provisions, we are concerned amendments will be offered to Farm Bill 2.0 during committee markup that unnecessarily restrict AWA licensees, dealers and dog owners. Problematic potential Amendments that are opposed by AKC include:

- **Language in the Better CARE for Animals Act (HR 3112/S 1538) would expand the power of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to enforce any violation of the AWA and circumvent the USDA's authority and the expertise of its veterinarians and other animal experts** to enforce animal care requirements. HR 3112/S 1538 would also empower the DOJ to file charges, including potentially criminal charges, seize animals and impose penalties regardless of whether USDA has determined or even alleged that there has been a violation of the AWA. The USDA has the demonstrated authority and ability to work with the DOJ on rare cases involving criminal conduct. In fact, on March 8, 2024, the USDA and the DOJ Natural Resources Division (ENRD), signed a Memorandum of

Understanding (MOU) on Civil Judicial Enforcement of the AWA. On February 18, 2026, USDA Secretary Brooke L. Rollins, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem, and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced a coordinated effort to crackdown on AWA violators.

- **One-Size-Fits All kennel requirement that undermine best care practices.** Proposals from the **Puppy Protection Act (S. 4437/H.R. 2254)** included inflexible and arbitrary prohibitions on breeding a dog based solely on size and age; mandated full-time “unfettered access to exercise area large enough to allow extension of full stride”, arbitrary temperature requirements, and other requirements that become problematic without flexibility to allow for individual animals’ needs and requirements. According to the American Pet Products Association, 40 percent of the dogs acquired by American households are sourced, often with expensive “adoption” fees, from rescues and shelters, while one-third come from breeders. It is important to note that rescues and shelters, the leading source of dogs acquired as pets, are NOT regulated under the AWA. Due to the increasing number of animal abuse and sub-standard care incidents with unregulated rescues, AKC calls on Congress to investigate the need to bring rescues under the AWA.
- Language from **Goldie’s Act (HR 349)** that redefines violations of the AWA to remove the distinction between minor non-compliances, such as paperwork errors, and serious animal care violations. The goal should be zero non-compliances, but AKC believes the health and wellbeing of animals should always remain the priority. Goldie’s Act also allows for immediate seizure or euthanasia without due process of any animal an inspector perceives to be suffering from “psychological harm” — a term it does not define.
- Provisions in the **“Greyhound Protection Act” (H.R. 5017)** that would restrict and potentially eliminate common dog training and event practices for certain field trials, performance events, lawful hunting with dogs, and other widely accepted training methods used by responsible dog owners and handlers.
- Provisions of the **Fight Act (H.R. 3946/S. 1454)** that will, for the first time, allow for a private right-of-action under the AWA, expand confiscation and forfeiture authority to include real property, and sets the precedent of including certain livestock (“roosters”) within the purview of the AWA.

While AKC and all responsible groups abhor and oppose all animal fighting, negligence or cruelty, it is a well-documented goal of animal extremist organizations to establish a private right-of-action to allow them to sue under the AWA, providing a federal litigation hook for extremist groups to initiate lawsuits, generate discovery burdens, seek attorneys’ fees, pressure settlements, and expand activist enforcement outside DOJ/USDA control. If Congress establishes the precedent for a private enforcement model in one part of the AWA, animal radicals will no doubt seek to expand that model to breeders, exhibitors, kennels, livestock operations, research facilities, hunting-dog trainers, rodeos, fairs, zoos, other lawful animal uses, and eventually, to field trials, rodeos, hunting and wildlife management.

The American Kennel Club appreciates the committee’s leadership and thoughtful inclusion of positive animal care provisions the Senate Farm Bill 2.0 and encourages unamended adoption by the Committee. Further, the AKC opposes potential amendments during committee markup related to the bills outlined above that would unnecessarily restrict responsible pet breeders and licensees. As we approach Senate Agriculture Committee mark up and possible floor action in September, AKC is happy to serve as a resource and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Sheila Goffe

Executive Secretary & VP Government Relations



**AMERICAN
KENNEL CLUB®**

Building America's Detection Dog Pipeline: Why Domestic Breeding Matters for National Security

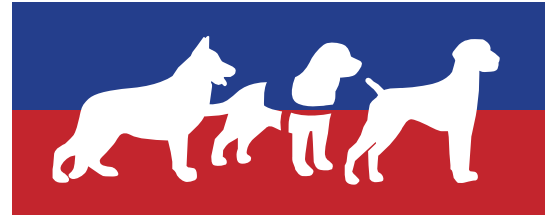
The demand for explosives detection dogs has never been greater. Every day, these highly trained canine teams safeguard airports, transportation systems, military installations, sporting events, schools, and critical infrastructure across the country. Yet one of the nation's greatest security challenges remains largely unseen—the United States continues to rely heavily on imported detection dogs to meet this growing need.

To help strengthen America's domestic working dog pipeline, the American Kennel Club's Detection Dog Task Force (DDTF) once again brought together the country's leading experts for the [2026 National Detection Dog Conference](#). This annual event served as the premier gathering for breeders, trainers, veterinarians, researchers, government agencies, and canine professionals dedicated to advancing the science and practice of breeding and developing detection dogs.

Why It Matters

Producing a successful detection dog begins long before formal training starts. Genetics, health, temperament, early puppy development, and environmental experiences all contribute to a dog's potential to excel in explosives detection work. As demand continues to rise among federal, state, and local agencies, building a sustainable domestic breeding program has become a national priority. The conference provides an opportunity for professionals from every

AKC® Detection Dog Task Force



stage of the working dog pipeline to collaborate, exchange research, and identify practical solutions that will help produce more qualified American-bred detection dogs.

A Collaborative Mission

Since its establishment in 2016, the [AKC Detection Dog Task Force](#) has worked to reduce America's dependence on imported detection dogs by fostering partnerships across the canine community. Through breeder education, research initiatives, professional networking, and programs like the [Patriotic Puppy Program](#), the Task Force is helping build a stronger, more sustainable domestic detection dog workforce.

The National Detection Dog Conference is a cornerstone of that mission, creating a forum where experts from government, academia, and private industry can share knowledge and strengthen the future of America's detection dog program.

Be Part of the Solution

The future of detection dogs depends on collaboration, innovation, and commitment to excellence. Every breeder who learns a new selection strategy, every researcher who shares groundbreaking findings, and every trainer who helps develop the next generation of working dogs contributes to a safer nation.

Lawmakers joined in the excitement of AKC Celebrates USA 250!

The first weekend in June, AKC Government Relations staff welcomed Philadelphia City Council members, Pennsylvania and New Jersey state lawmakers and Congressional staff to an action-packed celebration of dogs and America's 250th birthday.

This event is part of the AKC on ESPN Dog Sport Series. Over three days attendees were able to watch the [AKC Diving Dogs team challenge](#), the [Agility Premier Cup](#), and the [Agility Team challenge](#). 40 lawmakers signed on as [Honorary Chairs](#) showing their support for responsible pet ownership.

The AKC Government Relations booth was staffed by Executive Sec-

retary and VP, Government Relations, Sheila Goffe and Mid-Atlantic Government Relations Manager Charley Hall. They showcased AKC dog events, responsible dog breeders and dog ownership, and all the valuable contributions that AKC dog clubs and dog enthusiasts make in their communities. They also ensured that all who attended learned about responsible dog ownership and canine legislation.

"Our dogs are part of our shared history" Goffe said. "We are thrilled to welcome lawmakers to this unique event to celebrate our nation's birthday and showcase the remarkable bond between dogs and their humans."





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CANINE HEALTH
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The Science of Recovery

How platelet lysate could help veterinarians address wounds that won't heal

By Dr. Stephanie Montgomery

Most wounds heal through a carefully coordinated process of clotting, cleaning, and rebuilding tissue. When infection occurs, that process can slow or break down.

Chronic infected wounds are a common and frustrating challenge in veterinary medicine. According to Dr. Maria Naskou at Auburn University, these wounds are often complicated by biofilms, communities of microorganisms that adhere to surfaces and protect themselves within a slimy layer. In a wound, this layer can make bacteria harder to reach and more difficult to treat.

For dogs in motion, recovery matters. Cuts and abrasions are often an unavoidable part of the job for dogs that train, compete, or work in challenging environments. When a wound does not heal properly, it can lead to prolonged pain, limited mobility, and a delayed return to normal activity.

Dr. Naskou and her team are exploring an exciting new regenerative approach called platelet lysate. Platelets are naturally found in blood and are essential for clotting, but they also carry powerful growth factors and antimicrobial molecules that promote healing. By carefully processing platelets to create platelet lysate, researchers can unlock and study these healing components in a concentrated form, offering promising new ways to support tissue repair and recovery.

With CHF support, Dr. Naskou's team is optimizing a novel canine platelet lysate therapy and testing its ability to fight infection, both alone and in combination with conventional antibiotics. The goal is to determine whether this approach could help reduce bacterial growth in challenging wounds complicated by biofilms.

"Our team is currently preparing to develop and test this therapeutic product," reports Dr. Naskou. "We are in the process of recruiting dogs to be blood donors and are scheduling blood donations. Once blood has been collected, we will process the blood to concentrate the platelets and make platelet lysate for testing against bacterial biofilms."

The work is still in development, but the need for better therapies is clear. Dogs with chronic infected wounds need better options, and veterinarians need tools to support healing when conventional approaches fall short.

For performance dogs and active companions alike, recovery is essential to lifelong health. CHF-funded research like this helps bring promising ideas closer to the dogs who need them.

Sequencing the Clues Behind a Mystery Canine Respiratory Disease

A New Question in Canine Respiratory Health

Respiratory infections are familiar to many dog owners, often grouped under the umbrella term "kennel cough," which can include coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, and difficulty breathing when the deeper tissues are affected. But when an unusually long lasting and medication-resistant form of canine respiratory disease began appearing across the United States in late 2022 and early 2023, veterinarians, researchers, dog owners, and the AKC Canine Health Foundation recognized that the situation called for careful scientific investigation.

Dr. David Needle, a veterinary pathologist at the University of New Hampshire, began studying samples from affected dogs to better understand what might be contributing to the disease. His team collected nose and throat samples from veterinary clinics and analyzed the genetic material found in those samples.

What they found raised an important new research question. The DNA associated with the mystery disease did not match known canine respiratory pathogens. Instead, it appeared similar to a bacterium found in humans. Dr. Needle described it as a "small bacterium with a relatively small amount of genetic material" and noted that it appears to be a new addition to the canine respiratory microbiome, the community of microorganisms that naturally live in a dog's respiratory tract.

Studying BARDiD, One Genetic Clue at a Time

With support from the AKC Canine Health Foundation, Dr. Needle received more than \$300,000 in funding to study the

genetic makeup of this potential new pathogen and compare the respiratory microbiomes of healthy dogs and those with canine infectious respiratory disease complex, or CIRDC.

In a 2025, Dr. Needle shared early results from an analysis of 60 samples that tested positive for the newly identified pathogen, now called BARDiD, short for “bacteria associated with respiratory disease in dogs.” The data suggested that BARDiD is a divergent species with genetic similarities to a human respiratory pathogen discovered in 2021 called IOLA, or “Infectious Organism Lurking in human Airways.”

This work has required persistence. Dr. Needle explained that one key challenge is that BARDiD cannot be grown in the lab. As a result, his team has had to rely on getting the pathogen from nasal swabs, which can contain a complex mix of material, including other microorganisms living in the nose as well as DNA from the dog’s own nasal cells. That background “noise” makes it harder to detect BARDiD specifically.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that BARDiD and other respiratory pathogens are often more concentrated deeper in the respiratory tract, such as the trachea and lungs. Because nasal samples are more indirect, finding clear evidence of the organism there can be even more difficult.

A New Sequencing Approach for a Difficult Bacterium

To move the study forward, Dr. Needle’s lab used ARTIC, a DNA sequencing protocol originally used for Ebola genomics. The team adapted this approach for BARDiD and is calling the method BARC-TIC. According to the source material, this makes BARDiD the first bacterium to be sequenced with ARTIC.

“We are on target to complete the study by the end of June,” Dr. Needle told the Foundation recently. “And when we finish analysis of this final data, hopefully by the end of the year, we’ll be able to publish the whole genome of the potential new bacteria in dogs.”

The sequencing is now complete, and Dr. Needle shared, “We’re really really close to what one anticipates to be the full coverage of the genome.”

As the data are fully analyzed, the results may help researchers, pharmacologists, diagnostic laboratories, and clinicians better understand this unusual bacterium. Dr. Needle noted that the genome “could give pharmacologists a target.” He also said that respiratory pathogen PCR panels may eventually include BARDiD, which could help veterinarians understand “what not to treat them with” when a dog tests positive.

This is the step-by-step work of outsmarting infection: asking better questions, developing better tools, and using research to help the veterinary community understand what dogs are facing. With continued support, CHF-funded science can help uncover the microbial clues that shape canine respiratory health and move the field closer to answers.

Paws & Reflect

What’s the Challenge?

An unusually long-lasting, medication-resistant respiratory illness in dogs raised concerns that a previously unrecognized pathogen could be involved in some cases.

Need to Know

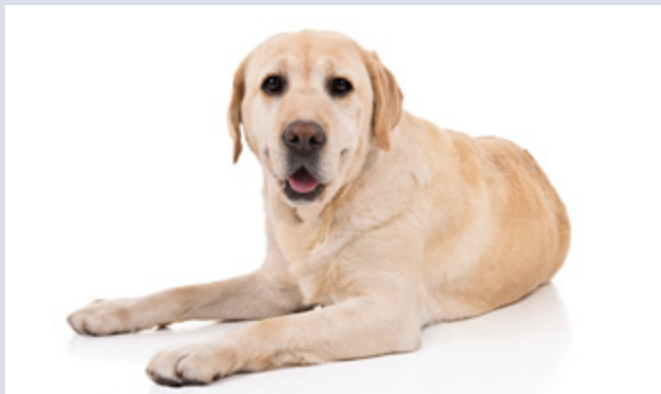
Researchers are still studying BARDiD, a newly identified bacterium that appears to be associated with respiratory disease in dogs. These findings are early and part of an ongoing scientific investigation, not a final answer.

Owner Tip

Keeping your dog up to date on the kennel cough vaccine is an important first step, as it helps protect against several common respiratory pathogens, and some cross-protection may also help reduce illness severity.

Dog owners should also watch for signs of respiratory illness—often referred to as “kennel cough”—such as coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, lethargy, or difficulty breathing.

If a dog shows signs of illness, it’s important to contact a veterinarian and keep the dog separated from other dogs to help prevent potential spread in settings like dog parks, daycare, boarding, or events and competitions where dogs gather closely.



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AKC Government Relations Department
(919) 816-3720 • doglawn@akc.org
www.akcgr.org
