New Survey Reveals Pet Ownership at its Highest Level in Two Decades and Pet Owners are Willing to Pay When it Comes to Pet's Health

American Pet Products Association (APPA) releases the 2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey, the most comprehensive consumer research providing insight on demographics, buying habits, and other traits of U.S. owners of dogs, cats, fish, birds, equine, reptiles, and small animals.

Greenwich, CT (Vocus/PRWEB) April 04, 2011 -- Pets are living longer and healthier lives thanks to pet owners' willingness to provide veterinary care, specialty foods, supplements and alternative treatment options. In fact, more than one-half of dog and cat owners report they would leap into action for an injured pet. Pet health insurance continues to be an area of growth as pet owners seek additional ways to ensure their pet's well-being. According to the American Pet Products Association's (APPA) new 2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey, the number of U.S. households that own a pet has increased by 2.1% to an all time high of 72.9 million.

Since the inception of the APPA National Pet Owners Survey in 1988, dogs and cats have accounted for nearly three-quarters of all households that own a pet. The actual number of pet owning households is significantly higher than it was 20 years ago, as is the overall number of U.S. households. While the actual number of households owning any type of pet has increased in the past 20 years, the proportion of ownership has remained relatively stable.

Both the number of pet owning households and those with multiple pets have contributed to the overall rise in total pet ownership. According to the Survey, there are more than 78 million dogs, 86.4 million cats, 151.1 million freshwater fish, 8.61 million saltwater fish, 16.2 million birds, 16 million small animals, 13 million reptiles and 7.9 million equines owned in the U.S. Approximately four-out-of-ten pet owning households in the U.S. are multiple pet owners.

"Although the economy has been a major factor for many industries, the pet industry continues to see unprecedented growth and diversity. The Survey reveals pet owners are willing to spend money on their pets despite a downturn in the economy," said Bob Vetere, president of APPA. "More products and services are available than ever to assist in responsibly caring for a pet, so it is becoming increasingly easier to add another pet to your household."

Below are just a few interesting facts pulled from the extensive Survey that tracks hundreds of pet ownership trends:

Benefits and Drawbacks of Owning Pets

The survey shows that pet owners are extremely consistent with attributes they consider beneficial to pet ownership. The top benefit of dog, cat, bird, small animal, and equine ownership remains companionship/love/company/affection. There's also a significant gain in the percentage of dog owners stating relaxation/relieves stress and walking/jogging/exercise as a benefit of ownership. Fish are loved for their appearance and being fun to watch and for offering their owners relaxation/stress relieving benefits. Reptile owners reported the two principal benefits associated with reptile ownership as being quiet and fun to watch and have in the household.

Amount Spent on Pets in the Past 12 Months

Excluding equines, dog owners spent the most to purchase their pet at $364, which is significantly more than the price reported in 2008 ($121). The increased price of pure breed dogs is definitely a contributing factor in this increase. The greatest expenses for dog and cat owners are food, kennel/boarding, routine veterinary visits and surgical veterinary visits. The greatest expenses for freshwater fish owners are ponds and expenses associated with owning them. Saltwater fish owners spend the most each year on aquariums, aquarium stands and other supplies. The greatest costs associated with owning a bird are cages, routine veterinary visits and surgical veterinary visits. Owners of small animals and reptiles paid the most for food, other supplies and routine veterinary visits. The greatest expenses for equines are trainers/exercisers, farriers, routine veterinary visits and surgical veterinary visits. There are some estimates that project pet owners spend an average of $11,000 per pet during its lifetime, even in times of recession.

Pet Obesity and Food

The use of specialty formulated food for dogs notes significant declines in 2010 (to 53% from 67%). Cat owners using a specially formulated food are down only slightly (to 60% from 62%). The percentage of dogs considered overweight by their veterinarian is 12%. Based on the total number of dogs in the U.S., that equals 9.4 million overweight dogs versus 10 million dogs in 2008. Among cat owners, there is a significant decline in the percentage considered overweight (to 14% from 21%), which translates to 12.1 million cats down from 19.6 million cats in 2008. Fewer overweight cats may be related to a decrease among those eating a special diet (to 9% from 14%). There is a gain in the percentage of birds considered malnourished or overweight to 1% from 0.3% in 2008. However birds on a special diet doubled.

Caring for a Pet’s Health

APPA projects that this year pet owners are expected to spend $12.2 billion for veterinary care, up from $11 billion last year and $8.2 billion five years ago. Bird owners reported the same number of visits as last year (2.0), but spent significantly more on surgical visits ($190 up from $55). Owners also took their cats to the veterinarian more often in 2010 (2.4) than in 2008 (2.1) and spent an average of $423 on surgical veterinary visits as compared to $278 in 2008. The average number of times a dog has been taken to the veterinarian in the past 12 months is almost three (2.7), which is nearly identical to the number of visits in 2008 (2.8). Interestingly, only 5% of dogs have been given a homeopathic remedy.

Pet Travel

While most pet owners will ask family, friends or neighbors to come to their home to care for their pets when they are traveling, an increased number will bring their pet along. Almost a quarter of owners reported they took their dog with them in the car when they traveled for at least two nights. Additionally, 4% of bird owners, 3% of small animals, and 2% of reptile and cat owners respectively travelled with their pet in the car. Unchanged since 2008, 3% of dog owners have taken their dog to work with them, an average of 22 times, up from 17 times in 2008. Based on the number of dog owners (46.3 million), approximately 1.4 million dog owners are taking their pet to work.

Training Devices

The percentage of dog owners currently using some type of training device or service to train their dog continues to increase while the percentage of cat owners using a training device or service has remained relatively stable. Approximately one-half of dog owners (48%) continue to use treats as a way to train their dog, versus 12% of cat owners using treats as a reward. One-out-of-ten dog owners also used an unspecified “other” device as a training method, as well as professional training, training books and videos and bitter apple.

What Pet Owners Would Do Upon the Death of Their Pet

Upon the death of their pet, two-to-four-out-of-ten owners (with the exception of equines) would buy something to either memorialize or bury their pet. Specifically, almost all equine owners reported they would do something; usually have their horse buried at a farm. More dog owners (18%) would buy an urn than cat owners (12%), bird owners (6%) or small animal or reptile owners (3% each). Less than 4% of pet owners would purchase a headstone. Among dog owners, the current percentage who said they would get another pet of the same type notes a significant increase (to 39% from 34%) over 2008.

Disaster Preparedness

In the 2011-2012 APPA Survey, pet owners were asked what they would do with their pets if they were faced with a disaster situation. For most species, the majority of owners would take their pet with them. In the event a pet owner would have to choose between their dog's or cat's medical treatment and their own, 16% of dog owners and 13% of cat owners stated their pet's medical treatment would take priority over their own treatment.

Gifts For Pets

The percentage of pet owners who purchased gifts for their pet in 2010 is practically parallel to what was reported in 2008. In spite of conservative consumer spending on themselves or other people, pets do not appear to be "victims" in the current economic climate. In contrast, pets appear to be the winners in these tough economic times. As a result of dog owners spending more money per gift, there is a 30% gain in dollars spent on dog gifts (to $73 million from $56 million dollars). Gifts are typically purchased for no special occasion but dogs, cats, birds and small animals are more likely to also receive a gift for Christmas. Additionally, the Survey reports 9% of dog owners and 4% of cat owners have held a holiday or birthday party for their pet.

Economy and Pets

For the first time, the Survey asked respondents if the economy influenced pet ownership in any way. The majority of pet owners reported that the economy hadn't affected their decision to own a pet, in fact, anywhere from 2% to 5% of pet owners reported spending more money on their pet than in previous years. It was reported, however, that 18% of non pet owners surveyed stated they did not get a pet because of the economy. These respondents are more likely to reside in the Northeast region.

Demographics

The Survey also profiles who the pet owners are and where they live in the U.S. Pet owning households are more apt to be defined as traditional families (76%) than the U.S. population (68%). Pet owners are also younger than the total U.S. population as a whole and significantly more pet owners are married (63%) compared to the rest of the population (55%). Approximately one-quarter of the U.S. population and all pet owners live in rural, small towns, as do specific species owners.

Primary Shopper for Pet Products

Unchanged since previous Surveys is the finding that at least three-quarters of primary shoppers for pet products are female. However, men reported spending more money on gifts for pets than women. The average age of the primary shopper for pet products remains 47 years-old.

Additional Trends to Note

In addition to the information provided in The Survey, APPA has noted additional trends in the pet marketplace that may affect pet ownership growth including: the total pet population continues to grow but at a slower pace; the pet industry continues to perform as recession resistant and show resilience both after September 11th and after the economic crisis throughout 2010; pet food trends mimic human food and diet trends; health and wellness focused pet products and services including pet insurance represent one of the most powerful current trends in the pet industry; pets are replacing children, so owners are even more willing to purchase products to satisfy and spoil pets; specialized pet services such as high end grooming and daycare are projected to grow as owners continue to work; research indicates that Black and Hispanic segments are the fastest growing U.S. demographic, but have lower than average incidence of pet ownership.

The complete 2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey includes more than 500 pages of trended information on pets covering the past two decades. The Survey will be available for purchase online at www.americanpetproducts.org.

The American Pet Products Association (APPA) is the leading not-for-profit trade association serving the interests of the pet products industry since 1958. APPA membership includes nearly 1,000 pet product manufacturers, their representatives, importers and livestock suppliers, representing both large corporations and growing business enterprises. APPA's mission is to promote, develop and advance pet ownership and the pet product industry and to provide the services necessary to help its members prosper. Visit www.americanpetproducts.org for more information.

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