



When Is It Time to Say When?

A Reflection for Labrador Breeders and Owners

By Tammy Jo Boudreau, Fairfax Pines Labrador Retrievers

THE LABRADOR RETRIEVER CLUB, INC.

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Most evenings, I walk down to the pond and the whole herd comes tearing past me — a blur of yellow, black, and chocolate, ears flying, not one of them looking where they're going. I always have the same small, foolish thought: if I went down out here, they wouldn't even notice. They'd simply settle in beside me, sun on their backs, and wait patiently for me to rise and feed them. The buzzards would have to take a number behind a pile of contented, snoring Labradors.

It makes me smile every time. But beneath the smile is something truer than I usually allow myself to sit with.

This life we build around these dogs is not a hobby, and it is not, in truth, a “program” — not in the tidy way that word reads on paper. It is a whole way of being, one that many of us understand instinctively and rarely put into words. I think often of the farmer down the road, eighty-one years old, still climbing onto his tractor most mornings, still driving that battered old truck out to do tree work and site work for neighbors half his age. No one asks this of him. It is simply what keeps him upright, what gives his days their shape and their purpose. I watch him and think: that is what this is, for us. The dogs are the reason we rise each morning. They are the quiet architecture beneath every ordinary day.

Children grow and go. They build lives of their own and call less often than we'd like. Spouses fall ill, or age alongside us, or leave this world far sooner than we ever prepared for. Houses grow too quiet, or too large for the number of hearts still living in them. Through every one of these changes, the dogs remain constant. They do not know we have grown older, or slower, or more tired than we once were. They know only that we came back. They believe, without fail, that we hung the moon — on our worst days every bit as much as our best. There is no loyalty quite like it in this world, and if you have known it, no explanation is necessary; if you haven't, none will quite suffice.

But here is the truth I have come to slowly, over many years: to love them well is to be honest about what lies ahead. Not today. Perhaps not for a long while yet. But someday. There may come a point when the kindest, most loving choice is not ten Labradors sprawled across the living room floor each evening, keeping you company through Wheel of Fortune. It may be one. It may, for a season, be none at all — while you heal, or rest, or simply catch your breath. That is not failure, and it is not an abandonment of a life's work. It is, in fact, the fullest expression of the very love that built this life in

the first place — a love willing to place their wellbeing above our own attachment to the way things have always been.

These dogs are stoic by nature, and that is the hardest part of loving them. They do not limp for sympathy or whimper to be noticed. They rise each morning, tails already moving, ready for whatever we ask of them — even when it hurts, even when we are the ones hurting. They will never tell us when it has become too much. And so the responsibility falls to us: while our minds are still clear, while there is still time, while nothing is yet on fire, to think ahead on their behalf. To ensure that whatever becomes of us, nothing befalls them that we would not have chosen ourselves.

If you have no plan yet, let today be the day you begin one. Not because anything is wrong. Simply because something this good deserves to be protected on purpose.

Building a Plan

Breed-club assistance. Your local Labrador club, parent club contacts, trusted co-breeders, and past puppy families are often far more willing to help than we expect — with feeding, kennel cleaning, grooming, exercise, transport, or temporary foster care. Most people want to be asked. Let them.

Temporary foster or respite care. Humane societies and community animal-support programs sometimes offer short-term foster care during hospitalization, rehabilitation, or a family emergency — a bridge to carry you through, never a permanent goodbye.

Pet food and veterinary assistance. Organizations such as The Pet Fund and Frankie's Friends offer certain types of veterinary financial assistance, and some senior-pet programs provide food or routine-care support. Eligibility and funding vary, so it is worth researching these resources before you ever need them.

Paid home help. A dependable kennel assistant, veterinary technician, dog walker, or farm helper can be hired for scheduled feeding, medications, cleaning, and exercise. For a breeder, someone experienced with intact dogs and kennel management is far safer than a general pet sitter — worth the extra effort to find well in advance.

Mobile veterinary and grooming services. These can remove the burden of transportation entirely, and allow your veterinarian to see your dogs within the environment they actually call home.

A breeder transition plan. Someone must know, in writing, who is authorized to make decisions, access veterinary records, manage registrations and contracts, contact puppy families, and place or co-own dogs should you become unable to.

A Written Breeder Emergency and Continuity Plan

If you maintain an active breeding program, I gently encourage you to put this in writing now, while you have the time and clarity to do it well. Keep a copy where your family or a trusted friend can find it — not tucked away in a drawer only you know exists. A printable worksheet follows on the next page.

A Gentle Reminder

If your dogs are currently safe but daily care has grown difficult, the kindest course is usually to bring in help early and gradually reduce your numbers — before circumstances force the decision for you. If care has already become unsafe, please do not wait for a crisis to reach out. A trusted Labrador breeder, your veterinarian, and breed rescue would all far rather hear from you a little too soon than not at all.

These dogs give us everything, and never once ask whether we have made a plan for them. The least we can offer in return — the very least — is to ensure they never have to wonder.

BREEDER EMERGENCY AND CONTINUITY PLAN

A working worksheet to keep with your records

Prepared by:

Date:

Emergency Contact

Person authorized to act on my behalf

Name:

Phone:

Relationship:

Veterinarian

Clinic name:

Phone:

After-hours / emergency:

Breeding Program Decisions

Stop breeding

immediately? Y / N

Who has authority to

decide:

Pending litters /

reservations:

Puppy Families & Contracts

Contracts / pedigrees

kept:

Who should contact

families:

Additional Trusted Contacts

1.

2.

3.

For Each Dog

Duplicate this page as needed for every dog in your program

Name / call name: _____ Microchip #: _____
Owner / co-owner: _____ Breeding status: _____
Medications / health needs: _____
Temperament / handling notes: _____
Feeding instructions: _____
Placement — temporary / permanent: _____

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