

California Dog Cloning Company Ends Services

BioArts International delivered the fifth and final set of dog clones in September.

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BioArts International, a biotech company in the San Francisco area, has discontinued its commercial dog cloning services. As such, the company has also ended its partnership with South Korean cloning vendor Sooam Biotech Research Foundation and its head Dr. Hwang Woo-Suk.

The fifth and final set of cloned dogs was delivered in September.

Lou Hawthorne, chief executive officer, cited a list of reasons why the company made its decision, a tiny market being one of them. He used the company's "Golden Clone Giveaway" as an example. BioArts launched the contest in May 2008 in an effort to collect more data on demand for dog cloning as well as to promote its services. The grand prize was a free clone of the winner's dog.

With all of the publicity surrounding the contest, Hawthorne said they expected tens if not hundreds of thousands of contest submissions. Instead, just 237 people signed up for the giveaway.

"Given how few people want to clone a dog when priced at zero, the market for dog cloning is at best a specialized niche," Hawthorne said in a statement posted on the company's website. "In a niche market, if one cannot capture a reasonably high price for each order, that market is not worth pursuing."

Hawthorne also blamed black market competition. A company that would offer the same services would be in violation of international patents, he said, because BioArts holds the sole, worldwide rights to clone dogs, cats and endangered species.

For instance, a South Korean biotech company advertised in February 2008 that it would clone dogs at a fraction of BioArts' price, starting at \$150,000 and then down to \$30,000.

"Of course, there is no technical way that [the South Korean company] can deliver clones for \$30,000 unless they completely abandon all bioethical safeguards for surrogate mothers who carry the clones to term—and even then it's unclear how they could make a profit," Hawthorne said.

Other factors that contributed to BioArts' decision included weak intellectual property; unscalable bioethics; unpredictable cloning results; and "distraction factor," which refers to negative media publicity.

BioArts reported that it is moving forward and will focus on the ongoing development of advanced tools and services for use in regenerative medicine, including micro-engineered cell culture devices and temperature-controlled bioshippers.