

Dog Breeders Meet to Discuss Golden Retrievers

Royal Canin gathered Golden Retriever breeders from all over the world to unleash its newest line of breed-specific food products.

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Scores of Golden Retriever breeders, veterinarians and others from around the world gathered in Chicago in mid-October for the Royal Canin Golden Retriever Symposium, a conference organized by the pet food maker to launch its newest breed-specific formula: Maxi Golden Retriever 25.

Like its other breed-specific diets, Royal Canin formulated the new food to address health issues associated with Golden Retrievers, including obesity, cancer, joint disease, cardiac ailments, eye problems, and skin conditions.

In addition, several breeders spoke during the conference, urging their colleagues to remember the breed's working history and its temperament, rather than aesthetics, in developing breeding programs.

The breed's working history includes use as hunting dogs, search-and-rescue dogs, drug-detection dogs, service dogs (including guide dogs and seizure detection dogs), therapy dogs, and family pets.

"These are the dogs we can't lose sight of [in our breeding programs,]" said Jackie Mertens, founder of Topbrass Retrievers during her presentation on working Golden Retrievers, noting that Leader Dogs for the Blind had begun breeding Labrador and Golden Retrievers together because it couldn't find enough Golden Retrievers to fill its needs.

Jeffrey Pepper, president of the Dog Judges Association of America, echoed that sentiment and said there was nothing more important for Goldens than their temperament, noting a "need to keep them as a wonderful family pet so they can do all their other jobs."

Pepper also encouraged breeders to mentor other Golden breeders, particularly internationally and especially in China, to promote responsible breeding programs. He was particularly concerned that some breeders were dumping inferior breeding stock to overseas breeders, thereby diluting the breed's qualities.

"If you wouldn't breed it, should anyone?" he asked attendees.

Toni and Ed Eames, both blind with Goldens as guide dogs, told attendees, "We love Golden Retrievers, but they are scarce."

To help address the risk of obesity, which in turn elevates risk of cancer and joint ailments, the new diet uses low-density kibble that allows dogs to eat more volume but ingest fewer calories. In addition, it contains psyllium, seed-based fiber that can form a gel in the stomach, thereby slowing the absorption of nutrients into the body. This essentially suppresses the dog's appetite because the body is receiving signals that it is still absorbing nutrients, thus does not need additional food, according to the company.

Participants in the conference came from at least 13 countries, including Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United States, and the United Kingdom.