



## **Forskningsfond Agria & SKK**

### **Research and Development Programme for the Agria and Swedish Kennel Club Research Fund for Companion Animals 2026-2027**

#### **Background**

In 2008, Agria Djurförsäkring (Agria) and the Swedish Kennel Club (SKK) decided to coordinate their research funds for companion animals. Since 2010, the funds have been jointly administered through SKK's offices, a research committee with external representatives that assesses the research applications, and a steering group that manages cooperative efforts. The funds jointly publish calls for proposals for funding and share an electronic application system.

#### **Purpose and goals**

The purpose of the Agria and SKK Research Fund is to promote high-quality scientific research relating to dogs, cats and other small companion animals in areas prioritised by the Fund. The Fund prioritises research into the physical and mental health of companion animals, as well as their social and economic importance for humans and society.

One of the goals for approved projects is that the research results should in the near term come into practical use and provide good conditions for better animal health and animal husbandry, as well as knowledge of measures to be able to work preventively. The second goal is to strengthen the relationship between animals, humans, and society. This is achieved by ensuring that research results contribute to creating knowledge and coming into practical use, as well as providing increased understanding of the significance of companion animals for improving human health through interaction with animals and for the positive effects this has on the individual and on society.

#### **Call for proposals, application preparation, assessment criteria, and communication**

Instructions regarding calls for proposal, application procedures, assessment criteria, communication, and other formalities are provided in the Research Fund's **Handbook for Applicants**, which is available in both Swedish and English.

#### **The research and development programme's three subareas and priorities**

Traditionally, research has prioritised areas such as health, feeding and reproduction in our companion animals. Today, there is a broader focus. Knowledge of the increased importance of companion animals in society has led to important new research areas, such as the relationship between humans and animals and the economic importance of companion animals in society.

The three research areas are:

- The physical and mental health, performance and welfare of companion animals and technology development
- The breeding and rearing of companion animals
- The role of companion animals for humans and society

### **Priority areas 2026-2027**

For the years in question, the Fund has chosen to prioritise both research relating to cats in all three research areas, as well as the entire research area of the importance of companion animals for humans and society, regardless of animal species.

In addition to pure research projects, the Fund is also interested in systematic surveys and meta-analyses in order to collate the literature available in the three research areas.

### **The physical and mental health, performance and welfare of companion animals as well as technological development**

Diseases that affect the health of companion animals are common. There are significant variations between different dog breeds in the incidence and type of diseases that affect them. There are also breed variations in cats, although this has been inadequately investigated. Further investigation of breed-specific diseases in dogs and cats, as well as increased knowledge of environmental and genetic factors that govern and influence the emergence of diseases in companion animals, are areas where there is a considerable need for research. Studies on new associations between diseases and genes should also be encouraged.

The relationship between environment and symptoms of disease in cats requires further study. This is the case for both gastrointestinal symptoms and certain respiratory symptoms that can be caused by high population density and high infection pressure. Too many individuals together, but also fewer individuals that do not get along, leads to stress, discord, reduced immunity, and so on.

### **Teeth**

Good oral health and good dental care for animals are important factors for the health of companion animals that need attention. Dental diseases in dogs and cats are common and cause unnecessary suffering. For example, tooth resorption (TR) is a very painful condition in both cats and dogs.

### **Gastrointestinal tract**

Gastrointestinal diseases are a major problem in companion animals and one of the most common reasons for veterinary visits. There can be many causes, with issues varying from harmless gastroenteritis to life-threatening conditions. Treatment with faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) for gastrointestinal problems is becoming increasingly common, but there is a lack of scientific evaluation, especially for cats. Parasites of cats and dogs in connection with gastrointestinal diseases need further investigation.

### **Feline infectious peritonitis**

In cats, feline coronavirus is a common cause of disease affecting the digestive system, although a mutated coronavirus causes symptoms from several different organs and death in cases of feline infectious peritonitis (FIP). Research on underlying factors as well as preventive measures is still needed, even though the disease has been in the spotlight for some time.

Happily, there are new drugs on the market with promising results. These are not yet registered in Sweden. Despite the fact that the treatment is frequently used both internationally and nationally, more knowledge is still needed about it.

### **Skin**

Skin diseases in companion animals are very common and often distressing for the animals affected. They can be difficult to diagnose and frequently the underlying factors are not fully understood. Therefore, the study and investigation of this group of problems is very important.

### **Musculoskeletal system**

Causes of injuries in bones and joints are an important research area, as is the need for evidence-based methods for rehabilitation. In working dogs, it is especially important to have a well-functioning and durable musculoskeletal system. There is a need for more knowledge about preventive measures that increase durability through, for example, well-developed and adapted training. Evaluation of health programs for skeletal and joint diseases, including the spine, is desirable. Objective movement analysis for companion animals can be a way to improve welfare.

### **Tumours**

Our companion animals are getting older and with increasing age comes an increased risk of tumour disorders. More than half of all dogs over the age of 10 years are diagnosed with cancer. Increased knowledge about the most common tumour disorders is important. Treatment methods for tumour disorders are developing rapidly, but there are few follow-up studies that show the value of these treatments.

### **Reproduction**

An important prerequisite for the successful rearing of healthy and sound companion animals is good fertility performance. As natural selection has been replaced by human breeding selection, great emphasis must be placed on the use of breeding animals that pass on good fertility performance, from mating to the care of offspring. It is therefore desirable to identify the genetic and environmental factors underlying good health in the reproductive system and good reproductive capacity, as well as deviations from these factors. Of particular note is increased knowledge of the factors underlying difficulties in giving birth naturally and where the goal is to reduce the number of difficult births (dystocia). Uterine inflammation (pyometra) is a disease that affects almost one in four bitches. Most often, it is middle-aged and older dogs that are affected, which often means that the dog has already been used for breeding. Here, more knowledge is needed to reduce the frequency of cases in the long term.

### **Neurological disorders**

Dogs and cats can suffer from many different disorders of the nervous system. For example, epilepsy and herniated discs are common problems. More research is needed to be able to make the right diagnosis more quickly and to initiate the right treatment in dogs and cats with neurological injuries and disorders.

### **Eyes**

Eye disorders are common in our pets and is an area where more knowledge about causes and treatments is required. For example, the genetic cause of many variants of Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) is still unknown.

## **Geriatrics**

Our companion animals are getting older. Research on the welfare and care needs of older animals in combination with ethical stances is needed. An important area of research is to identify treatable symptoms in time and to alleviate geriatric symptoms.

## **Genetics**

The rapid development of genetic engineering is important for breeding work but requires evaluation of the tests that are offered commercially. Continued research into genes that have a significant impact on the function and health of companion animals is important. Studies on new associations between diseases and genes should also be encouraged.

## **Feeding**

The nutrition of our companion animals is important for the function and health of animals throughout their lives. Knowledge of the changing nutritional requirements of animals at different stages of life and for different activities needs to be improved. Studies of diseases that are caused by improper feeding are important in reducing animal suffering, such as deficiency diseases and animals becoming overweight and obese.

## **Mentality**

Greater understanding of the mentality and behaviour of companion animals is required. In particular, knowledge of the factors that are important for the development of mentally sound dogs is an area where more research is needed.

## **Treatment evaluation**

As veterinary medicine develops, new surgical and medical treatment methods, as well as new diagnostic methods, are emerging. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of follow-up studies, which makes this type of research extremely important.

## **Technology Development**

Technology and material development are needed to develop measurement methods for dogs that work in the field. Likewise, objective measurement methods are needed within various activities as well as the transfer of data to different groups (spectators, owners, veterinarians, among others).

Examples of research areas:

- Monitoring and prognosis of dogs' health status
- Monitoring and analysis of training
- Injury prevention
- Interaction with stakeholders and data transfer
- Scanning technologies

## **The breeding and rearing of companion animals**

A neglected area of research in dogs and cats is what traits make them a good mother to their young, and how these traits are inherited and thus affect the physical and mental characteristics of the young later in life. Given the growing trend of neutering male dogs and bitches for non-medical reasons, it is desirable to encourage studies that establish how castration affects the

mentality and physical health of dogs. It is also equally important to determine whether castration has the effect that the animal owners are looking for with the procedure.

Other areas of considerable interest in breeding and rearing are:

- Comparisons between genetic coefficients of inbreeding and traditional pedigree-based inbreeding.
- Examine how different external traits correlate to different health characteristics and performance.
- Pedagogically illustrate the 'thresholds' that have been applied in the selection of breeding animals. What is breeding work based on in practice? For what reasons are breeding animals excluded?
- Is a dog that has shown awards used in breeding more often than one that does not have shown awards?
- Breeding for longevity.

### **The role of companion animals for humans and society**

Research in the field of humanities and social sciences is necessary to gain a better understanding of the importance of pets for both the individual person and society at large. Dogs and other pets are taking an increasingly larger role in society, and greater knowledge is needed about how they should have access to the different parts of society. Here, humanities and social science research can contribute to giving dogs and other pets increased acceptance in society.

Several studies, both Swedish and international, show the psychological, social, and economic importance of companion animals. When it comes to service dogs – which can be divided into traditional and social service dogs – corresponding research is lacking. What role do service dogs play in different organizational contexts? How are the work contributions of social service dogs assessed from the users' and society's perspectives?

Examples of research areas:

- Relationships and interactions between humans and companion animals
- Ethical issues concerning animal keeping and training
- Companion animals in health care, education and social care
- The benefits of service animals for humans
- Animal welfare in working dogs and other service animals
- The importance of companion animals for human health and lifestyle – and humans' impact on animals' health, behaviour, and well-being
- The importance of companion animals for human recreation and leisure
- The socio-economic importance of companion animals
- Health economics related to companion animals or social service dogs
- Historical studies of the role of animals with relevance to relationships between companion animals and humans today.

### **Relevant funds**

#### ***Agria's Research Fund***

Agria's Research Fund was founded in 1938 with the aim of promoting research for the benefit of companion animals, horses, farm animals and crops. Through the Research Fund, Agria works

to enhance animal health and improve animal husbandry, but also to provide peace of mind for animals and their owners.

The Agria Research Fund only funds research projects that benefit the specific animal species and aims for many animals of the same species to have a healthier and more sustainable life. Animals must never be subjected to suffering, and no animal may be subjected to unnecessary or painful animal testing.

The aim is to support veterinary medicine research and research and development projects relating to pets and pet care. This may involve the care of pets and providing support for investigations and studies that lead to preventive measures. The fund should also contribute to research on the role and significance of animals in society and how interaction with animals can help improve human health.

The objective is to provide support for research that, in a close perspective, leads to practical applications. It is of great importance that the results of the research are communicated in order to disseminate knowledge to relevant target groups.

Agria's Research Fund contributes allocated research funds for companion animals to the collaboration on the Agria and SKK Research Fund. Research funds can be applied for by researchers who work in one of the countries where Agria operates and where calls for proposals for research funds take place.

#### ***Bertil Lagerblad's Research Fund***

The purpose of the fund is to promote research in the areas that relate to dogs, primarily in veterinary medicine, genetics and ethology, but also research on the mental, social and economic importance of dogs to man. Particular attention should be paid to hunting dogs.

#### ***The Ulla Segerström and Bertil Sted-Gren Foundation***

Fund The purpose of the fund is to promote scientific research on dogs.

#### ***The Swedish Kennel Club's Research Fund***

The purpose of the fund is to promote research in the areas that relate to dogs, veterinary medicine, genetics and ethology, but also mental, social and economic importance, as well as the historical and cultural significance of dogs. Particular attention should be paid to the health of dogs and the opportunities to breed and keep dogs in Sweden.

#### ***Marina Reuterswärd's Fund***

The Marina Reuterswärd's Fund was established in 2023 and allocates funds for research on cancer in dogs.

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