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2010 Innovations Awards Application

Deadline: March 1, 2010

ID# (assigned by CSG): **10-S-09MO**

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Missouri

Assign Program Category (applicant): Agriculture

1. **Program Name** – Operation Bark Alert
2. **Administering Agency** – Missouri Department of Agriculture
3. **Contact Person (Name & Title)** – Dr. Jon Hagler, Director of Agriculture, or Misti Preston, Director of Strategic Communications
4. **Address** – 1616 Missouri Blvd., Jefferson City, MO 65109
5. **Telephone** – (573) 751-5617
6. **FAX Number** – (573) 751-5002
7. **Email Address** – mdadirector@mda.mo.gov
8. **Web site Address** – mda.mo.gov

9. **Please provide a two-sentence description of the program** –
Operation Bark Alert, a new program at the Missouri Department of Agriculture, was launched in January 2009 to crackdown on unlicensed dog breeders in the state of Missouri. In its first year, Operation Bark Alert led to the rescue of over 3,100 dogs living in deplorable conditions.

10. **How long has this program been operational (month and year)?**
Since January 2009

11. **Why was the program created? What problem(s) or issue(s) was it designed to address?**
In 1992, Missouri led the nation by becoming one of only a handful of states with a dog regulatory program. In a continued effort to stay on the forefront of animal welfare, Missouri once again took the lead in cracking down on unlicensed breeders with the 2009 launch of Operation Bark Alert. Operation Bark Alert was created to address the unlicensed dog breeders in Missouri that were not only putting licensed, reputable dog breeders at a competitive disadvantage, but also putting the health and welfare of animals at risk. Missouri has led the

nation in licensed breeding facilities and now it leads the nation in cracking down on those willfully violating the law.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

With new leadership in the state of Missouri and a renewed focus, in January 2009, the Missouri Department of Agriculture began an internal review of policies and procedures for the Animal Care Facilities Act, Missouri's licensing program for breeding facilities, kennels, rescues, city pounds and shelters. Policies are continuing to be standardized and procedures updated. In addition, an upgraded tracking system was put in to place in February 2009.

Training for animal care inspectors began immediately and more stringent standards and training has ensured consistent enforcement practices across all 13 districts in Missouri.

With the launch of Operation Bark Alert came a new online reporting system. With every tip from the public, animal care inspectors visit the location in question to validate the report of animal welfare. With the help from the public, Operation Bark Alert acted on more than 100 online tips in its first year, resulting in 40 separate rescues and surrenders.

As a second phase and follow-up to Operation Bark Alert, in May 2009, Prosecution Bark Alert was launched to prosecute those that put the health of animals at risk and willfully violate the law. Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster joined Director of Agriculture Dr. Jon Hagler in this charge and immediately put 173 kennel owners on notice to meet the standards required by law or discontinue doing business.

In 2009 alone, more than 3,100 dogs were rescued in 32 counties across Missouri. With increased prosecution, 173 fewer breeders were operating in Missouri in one year's time. In 59 cases, animals were seized, sold and surrendered from substandard kennels. Six warrants were issued to substandard breeding kennel owners by various county officials.

The Missouri Department of Agriculture received more than 200 Bark Alert tips through online reporting system and phone calls to the Animal Care Facilities Act.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

Operation Bark Alert is the first of its kind cracking down on unlicensed breeders. The increased focus on enforcement by the Department of Agriculture has paid off for Missouri. It is a true example of how a refocus of resources and priorities can turn a problem into a solution. Missouri has led the nation in licensing professional breeders and now are leading the nation in cracking down on unlicensed breeders.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchase for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Operation Bark Alert was launched with minimal start-up costs. As an improvement and addition to the current Missouri Animal Care Facilities Act program, Operation Bark Alert was able to use existing staff already in place (while adding two additional inspectors) and use resources on the

current Missouri Department of Agriculture Web site. Although there are costs associated with investigating each new incident of animal abuse or neglect, Bark Alert tips from the public cut down on the amount of time spent by inspectors searching for unlicensed activity. They now have the ability to act more effectively, removing animals from deplorable conditions and putting unscrupulous actors out of business.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

The Animal Care Facilities Act program, where Operation Bark Alert is housed, has total yearly expenditures of approximately \$785,000.

16. How is the program funded?

Approximately two-thirds of the Animal Care Facilities Act program is funded by fees paid by licensed kennels. The remainder of funding is through General Revenue.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order of regulations?

No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Operation Bark Alert uses software linked to the current Missouri Department of Agriculture Web site. The Bark Alert tip reporting site was established at BarkAlert.mo.gov and routes to the mda.mo.gov site. This information is maintained by the Animal Care Facilities Act program, the department's Director of Strategic Communications and the state of Missouri's Information Technology team.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and email address.

Yes. Dr. Jon Hagler, Director of Agriculture, 1616 Missouri Blvd., Jefferson City, MO 65109 (573) 751-5617, mdadirector@mda.mo.gov

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

No.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

Although the Department of Agriculture continues to expand the program, Operation Bark Alert has been fully implemented.

22. Briefly evaluate (pros and cons) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem(s) or issue(s). Provide tangible examples.

Operation Bark Alert, in its first year, identified more than 200 unlicensed kennels, rescued more than 3,100 dogs from substandard kennels and saw 173 fewer breeders in Missouri. By adding two additional animal care inspectors and by shifting priorities and resources, Missouri conducted 629 more inspections in 2009 than during the previous year. In 2009, more than 1,781 violations were cited.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

Local and national media attention increased in 2009 boosting consumer complaints greatly – helping the program rescue more than 3,100 dogs rescued in one year. Through letters from Missouri Attorney General Koster and increased media, unlicensed kennels were put on notice to improve current standards or find a new line of work. Unlicensed breeders took notice and Missouri saw 173 fewer breeders in one year's time.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Missouri already had a dog regulatory program in place for many years. Other states will need to adopt this while also incorporating advanced public reporting systems, increased awareness and creating a strong set of regulations and training system for inspectors. In Missouri, there is no seizure law for unlicensed breeders, meaning unless a determination for abuse or neglect is strongly documented, all violators are given 90 days to comply with standards.