



Buying from a Pet Store

Pet stores cater to impulsive buyers and consumers seeking convenient transactions. The stores ask no questions of prospective buyers to ensure responsible, lifelong homes for the pets they sell. Stores may be staffed by employees with limited knowledge about pets and pet care.

One of the most important things you need to know is that pet-store dogs are often churned out by mass-breeding facilities known as *puppy mills*. These facilities are often characterized by inhumane conditions, particularly for the breeding stock animals who are caged and continually bred for years, without human companionship, and then typically killed after their fertility wanes. Their offspring don't fare much better, and many suffer and deteriorate in the substandard conditions of the puppy mill. Add to this the stress of long-distance air or ground travel to pet stores hundreds of miles away, and you can understand why so many of the adorable puppies you see in pet stores are susceptible to a wide range of physical and behavioral disorders.

Few pet stores will ever admit selling animals bred in puppy mills; be wary of claims by pet store staff that they sell animals only from breeders that the store has "personally inspected." Such claims are usually meaningless. Be similarly wary of claims that the breeders are USDA-inspected. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) enforces the federal law called the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which regulates commercial breeding operations. But the act doesn't require all commercial breeders to be licensed. And the USDA establishes only minimum care standards in enforcing this law. Breeders are required to provide food, water, and shelter—but not love, socialization, or freedom from confining cages. Many USDA-licensed and inspected puppy mills operate under squalid conditions with known violations of the Animal Welfare Act. A USDA-inspected breeder does not mean a *good* breeder.

Also, be aware that purebred papers guarantee nothing. Even the American Kennel Club (AKC) readily admits that it "cannot guarantee the quality or health of dogs in its registry." In fact, puppy mill puppies often have medical problems that can lead to veterinary bills in the thousands of dollars.

Currently, 17 states have *pet lemon laws* that require stores to refund the purchase price or replace a puppy with congenital or hereditary defects. Imagine having to give up your puppy or other beloved pet after you've grown attached to him. Some of these laws allow puppy owners to keep their dog and be reimbursed for medical expenses up to the purchase price. But watching your puppy suffer from chronic health problems is heartbreaking for the whole family.

Dogs are not the only species mass-bred for sale. Cats, rabbits, ferrets, guinea pigs, reptiles, hamsters, and gerbils also are common victims of the commercial pet industry.

What You Can Do

The only one who can end this heartbreaking cycle is you. The Humane Society of the United States opposes the sale, through pet stores and similar outlets, of puppies and dogs from mass-breeding establishments, and urges consumers to avoid patronizing pet stores and Internet sites that sell any live animals. We urge you to visit your local shelter, where you are likely to find dozens of healthy, well-socialized puppies and adult dogs, including purebreds, just waiting for that special home – yours.

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