



Get the Facts on Puppy Mills

Puppy mills are breeding facilities that produce purebred puppies in large numbers. The puppies are sold either directly to the public via the Internet, newspaper ads, at the mill itself, or are sold to brokers and pet shops across the country. Puppy mills have long concerned The Humane Society of the United States.

The documented problems of puppy mills include overbreeding, inbreeding, minimal veterinary care, poor quality of food and shelter, lack of socialization with humans, overcrowded cages, and the killing of unwanted animals. To the unwitting consumer, this situation frequently means buying a puppy facing an array of immediate veterinary problems or harboring genetically borne diseases that do not appear until years later. In 1994, *Time* magazine estimated that as many as 25% of purebred dogs were afflicted with serious genetic problems.

Sadly, some dogs are forced to live in puppy mills for their entire lives. They are kept there for one reason only: to produce more puppies. Repeatedly bred, many of these *brood bitches* are killed once their reproductive capacity wanes.

Thousands of these breeding operations currently exist in the United States, many of them despite repeated violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is charged with enforcing the AWA; however, with 96 inspectors nationwide who oversee not only the thousands of puppy mills, but also zoos, circuses, laboratories, and animals transported via commercial airlines, they are an agency stretched thin.

The HSUS, along with other animal-protection groups, has successfully lobbied for increased funding for AWA enforcement. Although all 50 states have anti-cruelty laws that should prevent neglect and mistreatment of dogs in puppy mills, such laws are seldom enforced.

The Pet Store Link

The HSUS strongly opposes the sale, through pet shops and similar outlets, of puppies and dogs from mass-breeding establishments. Puppy-mill dogs are the “inventory” of these retail operations. Statistics from the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) indicate that approximately 3,500 to 3,700 of the 11,500 to 12,000 U.S. pet stores sell cats and dogs. PIJAC also estimates that pet stores sell 300,000 to 400,000 puppies every year. The HSUS estimates the number to be 500,000.

The Retail Pet Store Exemption Problem

The USDA has never required dealers who sell their animals directly to the public to apply for licenses, regardless of the size of the operation. The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) excludes retail pet stores from its minimum humane care and handling requirements, and it is the USDA’s position that these dealers are retail pet stores. However, many think that a person breeding animals on his own premises and selling them directly to consumers is not a retail pet store.

Each year American consumers purchase dogs from unregulated dealers who sell animals from their premises. Many of the animals are sold through newspaper advertisements and via the Internet, which means the purchaser can’t see the conditions in which the dogs live. A number of investigative reports, however, have revealed that these facilities can be horrific. Thirty-five years ago, Congress passed the AWA to, in part, ensure that breeders provide humane treatment to animals in their care. AWA requirements include adequate

housing, ample food and water, reasonable handling, basic disease prevention, decent sanitation, and sufficient ventilation.

On May 11, 2000, a coalition of animal protection organizations and individuals filed a lawsuit charging the USDA with failing to halt cruel and inhumane practices at breeding facilities. The plaintiffs outlined the USDA's illegal actions in exempting pet dealers who were not retail stores from compliance with the humane treatment standards mandated by the AWA. The complaint also described how the USDA's lack of appropriate application of the AWA can lead to the injury, illness, and death of untold numbers of animals.

On July 31, 2001, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ruled that the language and history of the AWA clearly show that an individual who sells dogs and cats from his or her own premises is not a retail pet store. Thus, the court found that USDA's exclusion of all commercial dealers who sell dogs and cats directly to the public is in violation of Congress' express intent under the AWA. The USDA is appealing that decision.

What You Can Do

To close down puppy mills and ensure the safety and humane treatment of animals trapped in commercial kennels, you can:

- Contact the USDA to register your concern that they do not regulate breeders who sell directly to the public. Ask them to drop their appeal of the court decision that clearly requires the agency to abide by the Animal Welfare Act mandate. Letters should be sent to:

The Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20259

- Encourage state and federal officials to stop the mass production and exportation of sick and traumatized dogs. In addition to passing new laws, legislators can demand that existing laws be enforced.
- Urge other people not to buy from pet stores, over the Internet, or from newspaper ads.
- Write letters to the editor about puppy mills and pet stores. Explain the mills' inhumane treatment of puppies and their contribution to pet overpopulation.
- Visit a local pet store to determine where it obtains its puppies. Don't be misled by claims that its dogs were not bred in puppy mills. Insist on seeing breed registry papers or the interstate health certificate for each puppy. The papers will list the breeder's and/or wholesaler's name and address.
- Contact your member of the U.S. House of Representatives and your two U.S. Senators, asking them to urge the USDA to strictly enforce the Animal Welfare Act and to support efforts to increase funding for USDA/Animal Care.

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