



DOG OVERPOPULATION AND PUPPY MILLS

Breeding Disease and Tragedy

Puppy mills are commercial breeding facilities which mass produce dogs solely for profit, often forsaking all else, including proper care, nutrition, and socialization. Approximately 90% of all puppies sold in pet shops are the product of these unscrupulous breeders who indiscriminately breed dogs without regard for the animals' feelings, well-being, temperament, or health.

Puppy mill operators treat their dogs as mere commodities and keep them in the most appallingly substandard conditions imaginable. The dogs are commonly housed in makeshift shelters where they are subjected to scorching sun and bitter cold without protection from wind, rain, or snow. Cages are often stacked several rows high, with the waste from the upper animals dropping on those below. The overcrowded and filthy cages are commonly infested with parasites. One puppy mill visitor reported seeing moldy food in the animals' dishes and maggots on the animals' skin.

Puppy mill dogs often receive little, if any, veterinary care and are fed inadequate and poor quality food. Commonly, female dogs are bred at every heat cycle, usually beginning at six months of age. Once their weak bodies can no longer generate profit for the breeder, they are considered a drain on the mill and are destroyed—usually by five years of age. Puppies are removed from their sickly and malnourished mothers at an early age and shipped to pet shops across the country.

Besides the appalling conditions, rampant inbreeding and lack of concern for congenital defects or inherited disease result in an array of genetic problems. Puppy mills are largely responsible for making deafness a characteristic of dalmatians; hip dysplasia common to German shepherds, rottweilers and many other large breeds; and epilepsy a frequent malady of beagles. Many behavioral problems, including severe aggression disorders, may also be attributed to puppy mill breeding.

Sadly, at the expense of the animals, the deplorable living conditions, careless breeding, separation from their mothers at an extremely early age and absence of early human companionship, combined with poor genetics, inadequate food and lack of veterinary care, result in maladjusted and sickly puppies with little chance for happy or healthy lives.

The many problems afflicting puppy mill animals are passed on to unsuspecting consumers when buyers pay exorbitant prices for these pitiful animals at posh pet shops and then watch their cherished pets die before their eyes, helpless to remedy or prevent the diseases bred into the animals. Many owners pay thousands of dollars as they try in vain to cure these inherent problems.

Callous Breeders

Puppy mill operators are candid about their indifference toward their animals. When discussing the large number of sick and dying animals attributed to puppy mills, one breeder casually commented, "When you have livestock, you have deadstock." Another puppy mill operator described the unfortunate victims of his greed as, "It's an animal. It's just like any crop that comes along."

With uncaring attitudes like these, it's no surprise that surveys conducted in several states revealed that approximately half of all puppies sold in pet shops were sick or incubating diseases at the time of sale.

Current Situation

There are approximately 10,000 puppy mills in 47 states and Puerto Rico, with the majority being located in the Midwestern United States and Great Plains, including Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. On the East Coast, Pennsylvania is notorious for puppy mills, with Lancaster County having the greatest concentration of puppy mills in the country.

Due to the attention focused on puppy mills by animal protection organizations and the media, the public is gradually becoming aware of the misery in which these animals are born, bred and raised.

Awareness was heightened in the autumn of 2007 by media coverage of a raid by law officers on an unlicensed puppy mill found to house more than 1,000 dogs in cramped wire cages in Hillsville, VA.

In the spring of 2006, a Maxton, North Carolina man was convicted of abusing close to 100 dogs at his makeshift puppy mill. Water bowls green with algae, cages filled with feces piled over four inches high, and parasites galore were endured by the dogs forced as breeding machines at this mill. Health ailments including body sores, horrific skin problems, and emaciation were suffered by many animals in this puppy mill.

Not surprisingly, transporting practices are also inhumane.

The young puppies, newly separated from their mothers, are crammed into cages for trips which often last several days. Again, they are denied adequate care, food, and water.

In August of 2006, a truck carrying 60 puppies from Missouri to East Coast pet shops caught on fire, killing all 60 puppies.

Increasing media coverage of these types of events, coupled with a massive educational campaign by those dedicated to eliminating puppy mills, can greatly aid our fight to end these barbaric breeding factories.

The Overpopulation Crisis and Puppy Mills

The enormous number of puppies mass produced in puppy mills adds to the tragic problem of pet overpopulation and the killing of millions¹ of unwanted dogs each year. It is unthinkable that people are intentionally bringing more dogs into this already overpopulated world. Purchasing a puppy from a pet shop perpetuates the vicious cycle by encouraging more breeding, which leads to more killing.

Regulation

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for regulating licensed puppy mills. However, current procedures are ineffective and inadequate. Staff shortages sacrifice the ability to properly manage the arduous task of inspecting the facilities and enforcing even the minimal requirements of the Animal Welfare Act. Many breeders simply refuse to comply with orders or neglect to license their kennels, thereby excluding themselves from investigation.

In describing this regulatory system, ISAR does not wish to imply that we approve of even well-regulated puppy mills. On the contrary, *ISAR is working toward their total elimination.*

"Lemon" Laws

After a nine-year struggle by animal advocates, Pennsylvania finally joined at least 11 other states in establishing a puppy lemon law. Laws vary from state to state. Most apply only to retail pet stores and cover contagious diseases for a period of 7 to 15 days and hereditary defects for up to one year. Many offer replacement, refund of purchase price and/or veterinary expenses for diagnosing and/or treating the dog (not to exceed the purchase price of the dog). Additionally, some states' laws apply to cats as well as dogs. (See our comment concerning total elimination of puppy mills.)

Puppy Mills Must Be Outlawed

Legislation to regulate puppy mills is not enough to stop money-hungry breeders from rampantly adding to the pet overpopulation problem. These animal factories do not need to be regulated, but rather outlawed entirely.

ISAR Is Being Heard

Consumers have the power to end puppy mills. For years, ISAR has called for a boycott of pet stores that sell animals. We are pleased to announce that three of the largest pet shop chains in the United States- PETCO, PetSmart, and Pet Supplies Plus - no longer sell puppies. Instead, these stores sell only pet supplies and offer homeless animals for adoption, in conjunction with local animal shelters. According to the the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, the number of pet stores selling dogs has remained around 3,500, down from approximately 6,000, over the last ten years. Please continue to boycott pet stores that do sell animals (and be sure to let them know why) and please remember to express your gratitude to pet shops which do not offer animals for sale.

¹ Neither ISAR, nor any other organization in the United States, has a reliable estimate of how many dogs are euthanized by shelters in this country.

What ISAR Asks You To Do:

The greedy puppy mill operators will cease this irresponsible breeding only when there is no longer a demand for the animals they produce.

- **Demand that pet shops stop selling animals.** Suggest they offer pet supplies and hold regular "adoption days" in coordination with local humane societies or shelters. Pet shops may also be encouraged to post an adoption bulletin board for use by shelters and others to find homes for needy animals. Follow up verbal conversations with a written letter to the owner or manager of the pet shop reiterating your ideas and requests.

- **Adopt your next companion animal from a shelter.** Millions of homeless animals are waiting in shelters across the country to be someone's special companion. They offer love, loyalty and devotion to anyone willing to give them the opportunity to live.

Humane societies have a large selection of both purebred and mixed breed animals. If your local shelter does not have the particular breed you are looking for, leave your name and phone number and ask them to inform you when one becomes available. You may also contact a rescue group that specializes in the breed you're interested in. Be sure to research all characteristics of the breed of your choice and make sure it fits your lifestyle. Adopting a pet is a life-long commitment.

Adult animals are an excellent choice. They often have some training and may save you the trouble of housebreaking. They will be through the "chewing" stage and you will have a better idea of the characteristics of the adult dog, including size and temperament.

- **Demand that your legislative representative outlaw (not merely regulate) puppy mills and ban animal sales by pet shops.** Puppy mills are inhumane, irresponsible, and they contribute to pet overpopulation and therefore increase taxpayers' expense of killing animals.

- **Support or initiate breeding bans in your community.** ISAR can provide model legislation.

- **Join ISAR's ongoing boycott of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.** This county has the largest concentration of puppy mills in the country. Please contact the Pennsylvania Tourism Office and let them know you will not visit Lancaster County due to the deplorable puppy mills housed there. They may be contacted at: Pennsylvania Office of Travel, Tourism and Film Production, Room 400, Forum Building; Harrisburg, PA 17120; Phone: 1-800-VISITPA; Fax: (717) 787-0687.

- **Write letters to the editor of papers.** Be sure to portray the conditions of puppy mills and their contribution to the number of purebreds killed in shelters each year. Form letters are available from ISAR.

- **Write to the AKC.** The AKC bolsters the puppy mill industry by issuing AKC registration papers to puppy mill animals, thereby increasing the value of the puppies and making puppy mills more profitable. The AKC could diminish puppy mill activity by refusing to register their animals, as many people would not buy the dogs without AKC papers. You may contact this organization at: The American Kennel Club; 5580 Centerview Drive; Raleigh, NC 27606.

- **Complain to APHIS.** Demand that this governmental office shut down puppy mills. You may contact this office at: USDA, APHIS, Animal Care; 4700 River Road, Unit 84, Riverdale, MD 20737-1234; Phone: (301) 734-7833; Fax: (301) 734-4978.

Please join ISAR as we persist in this battle to eradicate puppy mills, an essential battle in our War on Dog and Cat Overpopulation. Your voice can make a difference.