Greyhound Racing: Gambling with Dogs’ Lives

The HSUS is asking Florida residents not to sign petitions in support of a constitutional amendment allowing slot machines in pari-mutuel facilities. We are joining forces with other animal protection organizations and critics of expanded gambling, including No Casinos, to oppose that ballot initiative because of the impact it will have in perpetuating cruelty to racing greyhounds.

The HSUS has actively opposed greyhound racing for years because of the abuses of the dogs and the suffering of the animals used in their training. We are campaigning in opposition to the amendment because it will bolster the tracks financially and keep greyhound racing in the state indefinitely. “This effort to add slot machines to greyhound tracks is a desperate attempt to breathe life into a dying industry,” says Laura Bevan, SERO director. “The greyhound racing industry has a long record of exploiting and abusing dogs. Any citizen concerned about the welfare of dogs should vigorously oppose this ballot initiative.”

With attendance at race tracks

Much of a racing greyhound's life is spent in a cage.

Combating Animal Fighting in the Region

Animal fighting is a brutal activity and one of the more blatant forms of animal cruelty in our society. In these so-called “sports,” two dogs or roosters are placed in a large boxed-off area called a pit and urged to fight until one gives up or dies. While the animals are tearing at one another, attendees cheer on their favorite and make bets on the winner.

The HSUS has long opposed animal fighting and led the charge years ago to pass existing laws making animal fighting illegal. However, we now see signs of resurgence in its popularity, which may be attributed to the presence of animal fighting Web sites that give fighters the ability to network and find new members.

At SERO we have had a swell of complaints from citizens who suspect animal fighting, calls from law enforcement agencies seeking advice about how to handle these cases, and animal shelters receiving increasing numbers of dogs with scars and open wounds from fighting. While we try to help these and all callers, the time has come for a more proactive approach to stopping this growing problem.

Working for Tougher Laws

Nationally, dogfighting is illegal in all states, but cockfighting is still legal in New Mexico, Arizona, and Oklahoma. Throughout the Southeast, dogfighting is a felony. However, cockfighting is a felony only in Florida. In the other states, it is only a misdemeanor for the fighters and sponsors, and attending a fight may be legal. Finding an animal fight in progress can be extremely difficult because the events are held in secret. However, in the last few years there have been some successes with dogfight raids in Georgia and in a number of Florida counties, including Palm Beach, Broward, Charlotte, Seminole, and Nassau.

For the last two years, The HSUS has partnered with the Animal Rights Foundation of Florida to introduce a bill to strengthen Florida's animal fighting statute. This year, we came very close to improving part of the law, but lost the bill when the Legislature ended without final approval. The good news is that we found some strong allies, and we will be back next year.

Currently, Florida law focuses on the actual fight and doesn't make the possession, breeding, sale, or transport of fighting animals illegal. In essence, law enforcement officers have to raid a fight in progress in order to make arrests. Those involved in hosting the fight and those in the pit are charged with the felony crime and the spectators are charged with misdemeanors.

The intent of the original legislation was to give law enforcement the incentive and legislative tools it needs to combat animal fighting at its roots. Activity related to the continued on page 2
Greyhound Racing Facts:

- A greyhound can live to be about 13 years old as a companion animal. Racing greyhounds, “whippets,” are over between 3 and 4 years of age.
- Some racing greyhounds are adopted after their racing days end, but some are not. The dogs are killed, usually in the least expensive manner possible, which may include gas suffocation.
- Racing greyhounds spend the majority of their adult lives in crates, pens, or fenced enclosures. Human companionship is limited. Many enclosures are not climate-controlled, causing the dogs weather-related distress.
- Greyhounds aren’t the only animals harmed by the dog-racing industry. The HSUS has found that training activities cause as many as 100,000 domestic rabbits and wild jackrabbits to be killed and killed yearly. One event, known as “coursing,” involves greyhounds chasing and eventually killing rabbits within fenced enclosures.
- Revenue made by dog tracks amounts on average to far less than one percent of a state’s annual income.

Greyhounds are not a natural breed and are bred for racing. This unnatural activity leads to a number of problems including:

- Health problems: Greyhounds are prone to a number of health problems including dental problems, osteoarthritis, and heart problems.
- Behavior problems: Greyhounds are known for their high energy levels and can be difficult to control.
- High mortality rate: Greyhounds have a high mortality rate due to the stress and rigors of racing.

Greyhounds are often returned to their owners after their racing careers are over, but many are abandoned or neglected. The HSUS is working to reduce the number of greyhounds that are raced each year and to improve their welfare.

SERO Training Helps Protect Horses

The southeast has a large population of horses, and they are often the victims of animal cruelty, whether through ignorance of their care or by deliberate violent acts. They can also become victims of disasters—other natural, such as hurricanes, or manmade, such as horse trailer accidents.

SERO continues to offer educational opportunities concerning horses for humane societies, animal control, law enforcement agencies, and emergency responders. Last year, we hosted an equine cruelty investigation workshop in Georgia that drew participants from several states. This year we are hosting a large

Volunteers Needed in Historic Campaign Against Factory Farming

The HSUS has joined other animal organizations in support of a historic ballot initiative campaign in Florida to protect pigs from cruelty and abuse. It is the first ballot initiative in any state advanced to combat factory farming. The HSUS is working under the banner of a coalition called Floridians for Humane Farms to qualify a ballot initiative for November 2002 to ban the use of gestation crates—narrow metal cages that confine pregnant sows for the duration of their pregnancies. The crates are so compact that they do not allow the animals to turn around, causing their muscles to atrophy and producing enormous stress and psychological torment. This is unacceptable cruelty, especially for such intelligent, social animals. Before a sow is “spent” and sent to slaughter, she may endure five to 10 pregnancies in the crate, spending up to three years in complete confinement.

We must gather 650,000 signatures of registered voters by June 2002 to secure a place on the ballot. We need all HSUS members to help. If you are willing to circulate a petition and collect signatures—and we desperately need your help—please contact Floridians for Humane Farms today at 954-946-1461, or send an e-mail to info@bancruealfarms.org. You can learn more about the campaign by going to www.bancruealfarms.org.

Requirements for an amendment to be placed on the ballot. Florida’s Attorney General Bob Butterworth has already signaled his opinion that the amendment doesn’t qualify.

If the State Supreme Court approves the amendment, petitioners must seek to have it on the 2002 ballot. The HSUS will continue to educate its members and the public on the industry’s surplus breeding practices, the often cruel methods by which unwanted dogs are disposed of, and the daily conditions in which many dogs are forced to live. We believe Florida voters won’t support slot machines in a horse-racing facilities when they understand that if a vote for expanded gambling is a vote perpetuating abuse of these dogs.
stop animal fighting of any type. Laws must be strengthened, and law enforcement agencies must put time and energy into investigating animal fighting cases. Animal fighting may be in the shadows, but it is everywhere, and it will take concerted efforts to vanquish it.

One of the reasons I despise dogfighting so much is my love for my own dogs. The newest member of my family is Catfish (at right), whom I found as a puppy in an Alabama animal shelter last November. I had visited the shelter with members of the Alabama Humane Federation to perform a shelter evaluation. In the middle of the tour, a small puppy in a large pen kept watching me. I tried not to look, but his sad eyes haunted me. Finally, I could take it no longer, and much to the amusement of my companions, wrapped him in a towel and promised to take him to Tallahassee and find him a new home. We named him Catfish because of his smell and some strange dark hairs on each side of his chin that look like catfish whiskers.

Catfish was a sick little puppy, and after four weeks of quarantine in my kitchen, I was a goner. However, I hadn't owned a puppy since I was a teenager and didn't remember that puppy cuteness is to make you love them … then they wreck your house. At one point, most of my furniture was hidden in the garage. Things I never considered possible chew toys were in pieces on the living room floor for my viewing entertainment when I came home. The best was when he carried several flowerpots of dirt into the house. When I got home the entire living room was covered in soil. That was a Catfish classic!

But Catfish has also been a wonderful addition to my household. At the end of January, my little poodle mix Pooh died in her sleep unexpectedly. I was grief stricken, and Catfish was a comfort to me as he snuggled in the chair as Pooh once did. He has also breathed new life into my other dogs, all getting into their senior years. He jumped and chewed on them until they played with him like they haven't in ages. My 17-year-old cat, who had taken joy in tormenting the older dogs in the past, actually allows Catfish to give her kisses. He is an amazing pup, and I look forward to many happy years together. He is truly man's—and woman’s—best friend.

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Promoting the protection of all animals