HSUS Request Results in Turtle Sale Ban

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has banned the sale of pet turtles in the United States because turtles are proved transmitters of infectious salmonella to children. The action, which took effect June 23, is the culmination of a concentrated effort by HSUS and Consumers Union to obtain a ban that would protect children from the illness and prevent the cruel disposal of pet turtles when cases of salmonella are discovered.

Salmonella causes diarrhea, fever, and severe enteritis in children. HSUS and Consumers Union contended that it is impossible to produce salmonella-free turtles on a commercial scale.

HSUS and Consumers Union had filed petitions with FDA and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission in March, 1974, in support of a ban on all pet turtle sales.

HSUS's primary goal in submitting the petitions was to advise the agencies that the method the pet industry was proposing to lessen the risk of disease, namely keeping the turtles out of water for most of their lives, was "greviously inhumane" to the turtle and did not in fact significantly decrease the chances of disease. By keeping turtles out of water all but 30 minutes a day, the pet industry's plan would have resulted in dehydration, malnutrition, and poor muscle and bone development in turtles, HSUS contended.

HSUS, with the assistance of Mrs. Mary L. Anderson, an HSUS member from Roanoke, Va., who has conducted a 12-year personal campaign to obtain such a ban, has been abreast of FDA's handling of the problem throughout its study and action phases. HSUS recently urged FDA to effect the ban before the June hatching season to prevent a new proliferation of turtles on the market.

HSUS is now concerned with ensuring that all turtles that have to be destroyed under FDA order are destroyed in the most humane manner possible. Unfortunately, FDA left the door open for the pet industry to create a disease-free turtle breeding and distribution scheme, saying that if such a scheme could be developed, FDA would reconsider the whole matter.

The ban applies to all turtles with a shell length of less than 4 inches and the eggs of such turtles.

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