HSUS Uncovers Cruel Puppy Mills

Investigator exposes hidden misery on mass breeding farms

“Most of the people I visited were farmers or farm wives who raised dogs strictly to supplement the family income, and while many said they liked dogs, it was clearly their profit potential that was cherished. ‘The best dog I ever had’ is usually the one that produces the most pups per litter. One breeder told me she tried hard NOT to get attached to her dogs, because she had to put them to sleep when they were only five or six years old and could no longer produce enough puppies to guarantee a profit. ‘If you breed on the first heat and keep on breeding every six months until they’re about five or six, you’ll make a lot of money,’ she told me, expressing the same attitude as most of the other puppy mill operators I encountered.

“The most common problems I saw at the puppy mills were inadequate housing and poor sanitation. Many of the dogs who lived indoors inhabited converted chicken coops, pigpens, barns, sheds, or even old house trailers. Most of the animals who lived outside were either chained to small doghouses or kept in pens with wire bottoms. The idea of having wire bottoms so waste can fall through is to make it easier to clean up after the dogs. It was all too common, however, to see piles of excrement in and under the cages, obviously accumulated over a period of days or weeks, causing not only an unbearable smell, but also a health hazard. While wire bottomed cages may or may not make it easier to care for the dogs, it certainly seemed to make life uncomfortable for them. Puppies couldn’t walk because their small paws fell through the wire mesh, and their mothers often spend their entire lives standing uncom-

How many people who see puppies for sale in clean, comfortable surroundings ever imagine the squalor that the puppy’s parents live in permanently? The victims of puppy mills are not only the puppies themselves, but also the adult dogs sentenced to lives devoid of human contact and the comforts most of us try to extend to man’s best friend.
For the purposes of this report, a puppy mill is a mass dog breeding establishment that produces puppies for profit by selling them wholesale to the pet industry. Many puppy mills are characterized by overcrowding, filth, inadequate shelter, and insufficient food, water, and veterinary care. Most puppy mill owners sell their dogs wholesale to brokers who, in turn, sell them primarily to pet stores. Because profit, not quality, is the ultimate goal of the puppy mill owner, breeding practices are often shoddy, and the breeding dogs are kept under the most inexpensive possible conditions that will keep them alive and reproducing.

In contrast, there are hundreds of responsible and reputable kennels and breeding establishments throughout the country whose owners make a profit, but not at the expense of their dogs. Whether these breeders are full-time professionals making an entire living from a kennel, or hobby breeders with five or ten animals, the responsible breeder is as concerned with improving the quality of the breed, by breeding only to a healthy animal belonging to a breed club, than he or she is with making money. Customers wishing to buy puppies from these breeders are welcome to inspect the premises, and, in most cases, to meet the puppy’s parents.

In between the puppy mill operators and responsible kennel owners are the so-called "backyard breeders". These individuals sell their dogs in small classified newspaper ads, and to pet enthusiasts who see them in the classified ads and decide to buy a dog. If the puppy is a purebred, they will often talk about how cheap the puppy is, and produce a litter of puppies once a year or so for extra money or "because I wanted my dog to have the experience of being a mother before she was spayed." Like puppy mill puppies, these animals are often hazardously bred with no regard for the consequences, and their offspring continue to overcrowd the nation's animal shelters.
What HSUS Is Doing

This pamphlet is the beginning of HSUS’ effort to end the cruelty of puppy mills. Armed with a year’s worth of extensive research and investigation, we are launching a massive public awareness campaign on the continuing plight of puppy mill dogs and their contribution to the nation’s already staggering pet overpopulation problem. Through publications like this one and the distribution of flyers like the one enclosed, we are hoping to bring the horror of puppy mills to the awareness of the dog-buying public, and educate them about the risks of buying a puppy mill dog.

We are continuing our investigation, and plan to take action to see that the worst of these atrocities are closed down. It has become clear, however, that consumer education is the most effective answer to the puppy mill problem. The Animal Welfare Act amendments that require breeders selling dogs wholesale to be licensed by the USDA were supposed to end the cruelty by mandating humane standards of care for dogs in puppy mills. Unfortunately, infrequent inspections, indifferent or inept inspectors, and a lack of funding have resulted in these regulations being insufficiently enforced or not enforced at all. Of the nearly 300 USDA-licensed facilities our investigator visited, he found only one which appeared to have no violations of USDA regulations. We will continue to employ whatever legislative and legal routes are available to bring about better enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act.

Consumer Outrage!

The HSUS has numerous complaints from people who bought puppies from pet stores, only to have them get sick and die shortly after they were purchased. Not all puppies in pet shops are from puppy mills. However, most puppy mill puppies do end up in pet shops.

We heard from a woman whose boyfriend bought her a Siberian Husky puppy from a local pet store. A few days after she took the puppy home, it developed sores on its stomach and bloody diarrhea. She took it to a veterinarian, who diagnosed it as suffering from mange and parasitic infection. The puppy was successfully treated, but the bills were staggering. Frustrated and angry, the woman marched with the puppy back to the pet store to demand that it live up to its guarantee of satisfaction and pay the vet bills. The store manager offered to replace the puppy with a new one, but said it was company policy not to pay the vet bills. The woman had grown attached to the puppy and wanted to keep it, and with no recourse against the pet store, had to pay the bills herself.

Only a few months later, we heard from a woman who had purchased two Yorkshire Terriers from a pet store chain in Northern Virginia. When both came down with parvovirus a short time later (killing one of them), the woman picketed the pet store to protest and to warn other prospective customers. A source in the shopping mall reported that business in the pet store was hurt the week the woman was picketing.

Of course puppies not purchased from pet stores get sick, too. However, the added stress of shipping a puppy long distances during the critical time just after it has been weaned from its mother often reduces the animal’s natural resistance to infection. Puppy mill puppies, which may or may not have received proper care or medical attention in their first few weeks of life, are especially vulnerable.

One pet store manager told our investigator, “If people are stupid enough to go to pet stores to buy a dog, they deserve what they get.”

What You Can Do

We can’t end the cruelty of puppy mills by ourselves. We need your help to show people that it’s wrong to think of dogs as puppy-producing machines, and to expose the hidden cruelty of puppy mills and the miserable lives the dogs in them lead. Here are some things you can do:

• Help us educate the public. Show the enclosed flyer to your friends who are considering getting a dog. Or send for extra copies and distribute them locally.
• If you or anyone you know has had a bad experience with a puppy you suspect is from a puppy mill, let us know. We may not be able to help, but your story, along with the stories of others, can make our case stronger.
• Visit your local pet store and ask the manager where the puppies come from. Inquire about the conditions in which the puppies were raised. If the dogs are brought in from out of state, or over long distances, or if the owner is unsure or equivocates about breeding conditions, encourage him or her to patronize only local reputable breeders or breeders whose facilities the owner knows.
• If you have friends who are getting a dog, encourage them to take a trip to the local shelter and adopt a homeless animal.
• Finally, help The HSUS help animals. Your tax-deductible contribution helps make possible our puppy mill campaign and all our other programs to help animals.