

The great American Midwest has long prided itself on being the breadbasket of America, the heartland of this country. Yet three midwestern states harbor some of the most disgraceful conditions for dogs found in the U.S. Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas are the leading "puppy mill" states. The United States Department of Agriculture's Animal Health and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS) currently registers about 6,000 breeders under the Animal Welfare Act that are qualified to display an official USDA license. The license certifies that these individuals and institutions have met the minimum standards established by the department. Primarily farming areas, the states of Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas have the greatest number of license-holders in the country. According to official USDA records, nearly 3,000 of the nation's 6,000 animal dealers live in these states. There are several reasons for the concentration. First of all, land is a relatively cheap commodity in the rural sections of the midwest; making additional room for a breeding facility is easy. And, in some areas, pet food is a by-product of the many livestock feeding cooperatives. Therefore, food can be purchased inexpensively. In addition this is an area populated by great numbers of farmers who see part-time breeding as "an easy second crop" according to Roger Caras.

While a number of these facilities are operated properly and responsibly, many of them are nothing more than cruel, filthy, backyard 'factories' existing for only one purpose—profit—with little or no regard for breeding standards, decent care, shelter, or medical attention. Yet these so-called 'facilities' are given credibility by the USDA who incredibly, has officially sanctioned them to operate. During a recent trip to the area, HSUS chief investigator F. L. Dantzler and HSUS's midwest representative Ann Gonnerman found it incredible that some of the places they visited had been approved by the USDA. One of the dealers had just been issued a license in June of 1976. The conditions were so outrageous, Dantzler said "... in most states, an arrest for cruelty to animals would have been issued on the spot." Indeed, Dantzler and Gonnerman have tried to prosecute several 'operators' in the three state area during the past 5 months and have found it very difficult. "After all" Dantzler said, "the local prosecutor has to convince a judge and often a jury that cruelty to animals is taking place in a facility the United States government has declared as being in compliance with the Animal Welfare Act."

## CLOSE-UP REPORT: PUPPY MILLS

An American Disgrace



The tragedy of puppy mills was highlighted in a recent ABC News feature. Ann Gonnerman, HSUS midwest representative, attends to a sick puppy being readied for shipment from the Kansas City, MO airport. Investigator Frantz Dantzler assisted in the filming which featured Roger Caras as special correspondent.



Puppy production involves a chain of participants besides the breeder and USDA inspector, who incidentally is either a veterinarian or a qualified animal technician. There is also the middleman or broker. Most often it is fulltime employment to travel around the countryside collecting puppies from his various "accounts"; holding them for the time prescribed by USDA regulations; procuring certified health certificates for each, and then shipping them around the country to his buyers who are individual pet store owners. The middleman merely supplies the demand created by the consumer. In so doing, he along with the other links in the chain makes a healthy profit. It is estimated that a dog sold by the breeder to the middleman for \$20-35 is sold by the pet store owner for \$85-100.

"Ironically, in the entire chain of production from whelping to sale in a pet store, probably the safest and most humane process is airline shipment," said Frantz Dantzler. "While this is usually the area which receives the most attention when the Animal Welfare Act is attacked, it is regulated and enforced far better than the breeders or the pet shops." Certainly, this can be attributed to pressure by The HSUS and other humane groups on the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) to adopt stronger regulations and the passage of the Foley-Weicker bill (see Summer/Fall issue of *The HSUS News*).

Why does USDA allow these puppy mills to continue operation? Why do their veterinarian inspectors do a haphazard job of licensing them? "I don't know why or what their logic is," said Dantzler "but I know it is all wrong and it must be stopped."

It can be stopped but not until a tremendous amount of pressure is brought on the United States Department of Agriculture. HSUS membership is urged to write to Dale Schwindaman. Tell him you desire USDA to review those dealers currently licensed and to make sure presently licensed facilities are in compliance with the federal standards already on the books as law. Let USDA know you would support efforts for increased funding for APHIS to do a more extensive job. HSUS has every intention of actively following up this terrible situation and will do all in its power to stop it. HSUS will insist on better enforcement of USDA regulations and will continue to seek, through litigation, the issuance of criminal complaints. "... it is all wrong and it must be stopped."

## Famous Chincoteague Pony Roundup Improves Due to HSUS Efforts



For many years roundup of wild ponies on an island just off the peninsula shared by Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland has been monitored by The HSUS. Sponsored by a local volunteer fire department of the Delmarva peninsula, the proceeds from the sale of these ponies are used to support their activities. The ponies are rounded up on Assateague Island and then made to swim across to Chincoteague Island where the famous auction is held.

For the first time since The HSUS began observing and offering recommendations, it is felt the animals are now being handled in a humane manner. Critical of the practices and procedures employed in previous years, The HSUS has worked together with other experts in equine management and handling to correct many instances of abuse of the animals. "I feel that had it not been for the efforts of the many concerned humanitarians, the abuse of the Chincoteague ponies would have continued," said Phil Steward, HSUS investigator who was on the scene this past August. No foals were transported in trunks of cars or back seats this year, animals were not beaten with boards or whipped with bull-whips, foals under the age of three weeks were not auctioned, nor were foals that were not able to eat grass and hay sold—all of which had been the case in past years.

HSUS plans to continue to monitor this annual event and will take immediate action to insure the humane handling and treatment of the animals.