The great American Midwest has long prided itself on being the breadbasket of America, the heartland of this country. Yet three midwestern states each have 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. Very few of these 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 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."