

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.

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."