



Objective: to educate the public on the need to obtain dogs from shelters, rescue groups, or reputable breeders, and to stay away from puppy stores, internet sales, and mass breeders.

Introduction

Two to four million puppies are born in puppy mills (large-scale commercial breeding operations) each year in the U.S.¹ Profits, not animal welfare, are uppermost in the minds of “millers” who run these operations.

The Federation of Human Organizations of West Virginia (FOHO WV) is opposed to the large scale, mass production of living, breathing sentient beings. Instead, FOHO WV recommends people adopt from local shelters and animal control agencies or from reputable all-breed and breed-specific rescues or purchase puppies from reputable breeders.

An unpleasant industry

Breeding dogs for general sale began in the 1940s following widespread crop failures in the Midwest. In fact, it was the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that promoted the new “crop” to farmers. This same agency is responsible for the oversight of these mills.

However, according to a report entitled *Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Animal Care Program Inspections of Problematic Dealers*² issued in May 2010, the Inspector General of the USDA found the agency was not living up to its mandate to pro-

tect animals in commercial dog breeding operations.

A puppy mill is an operation that puts profits ahead of the welfare of the dogs. Health, nutrition, and sanitation are substandard when compared to responsible breeders. Illness, disease, and genetic anomalies are not uncommon in dogs bred in puppy mills. Fear and general lack of socialization are often noted in puppy mill dogs.

Breeding dogs live their entire lives in small wire enclosures. Females are mated until they are unable to produce any more puppies and then are disposed of in a variety of ways, including being shot in the head.

Dogs bred in puppy mills are often sold to brokers at auctions. From there, the broker ships the puppies to stores throughout the country for sale. Some millers sell directly to the public through newspaper ads and the internet.

At any given time there are between 2,000 and 3,000 USDA-licensed puppy mills in operation.³ This number is most likely modest as it does not take into account breeders operating without licenses or breeders who are not required to obtain a license.

As of 2008, “only twenty-six states have laws implementing regulations on commercial kennels. Those that have licensing requirements for ken-

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nels lack in substance and enforcement. The laws of each state differ drastically from one another, giving motivated breeders room to travel between states to find the location that has the least restrictive way to make money from breeding.” (Animal Legal and Historical Center)⁴

Today, the number is closer to 34 states that have enacted puppy mill legislation, including West Virginia.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, “There is an enormous demand for purebred puppies in the United States. Of the [74.8 million] dogs [owned in the U.S.], 16% are adopted from shelters, 31% are purchased directly from breeders, and about 6% are purchased from pet stores each year (Zawistowski, 2008).”⁵

When a puppy mill is shut down, the local animal control agency and humane societies often are faced with a glut of poorly socialized, sickly animals to care for. This puts a drain on their financial and human resources. Animal control agencies can’t possibly care for a hundred dogs taken from a miller.

Puppy mills, as opposed to responsible breeders, create much suffering for the puppies, their parents, and the purchasers who must often deal with their illness and death. They are profit-driven rather than dog-driven.

The taxpayers of the community cannot absorb the cost to feed, house, and care for these additional animals. Where is the money to come from?

In one single puppy mill rescue in Parkersburg, the cost to all agencies involved totaled upwards of \$200,000.⁶

Instead, with regulations in place to limit the number of breeding dogs and allow for mills to be routinely inspected, situations that require legal action against owners may be averted, thus saving local, state, and federal agencies from having to care for the animals.

West Virginia and puppy mills

The impact of puppy mills in West Virginia is staggering. In one single puppy mill rescue in Parkersburg, the cost to all agencies involved totaled upwards of \$200,000.⁶ In recent years, an estimated 2,000 puppies and adult dogs have been rescued from puppy mill facilities in West Virginia at a staggering cost to all agencies,⁷ both within and outside the state.

The West Virginia State Legislature passed a commercial dog breeding law, which became effective July 2013. 19-20-26 Commercial Dog-Breeding Operations states that breeders must obtain a permit and must meet standards of care as outlined in the code. A breeder is one who has eleven or more unsterilized dogs over the age of one and is breeding them for sale.

Conclusion

Puppy mills create much suffering on the part of the puppies and their parents and on the part of the purchasers who must often deal with illness and death. They are profit-driven rather than dog-driven. They leave the public in the lurch when their “merchandise” does not live up to their hype, or live at all.

What can citizens do?

Seek pets at the shelter. The first action any person should take when looking for a dog is to go to his or her local shelter or animal control agency or check online for breed rescue groups. Purebred dogs can be found at all these locations. Second, a person who is looking for a dog should *NEVER buy from a puppy store*, out of the back of a truck in a parking lot, or over the internet. The purchaser will almost be guaranteed he or she is participating in puppy mill cruelty.

Educate others. Other actions dog owners, friends, family, and colleagues can take to stop the proliferation of puppy mills is to send letters to the editors of local newspapers educating others on the horrors of puppy mills and suggesting where, instead, people should look for dogs when they are ready to add a canine companion to their family.

They can distribute fliers educating the public on the dangers of purchasing dogs from mills; sponsor an ad in the newspaper or a billboard; join organizations, like FOHO WV (fohowv.org), to fight for changes in the laws, better regulations and inspection standards, and public education.

Urge local officials to enforce the current commercial breeders' law that calls for the regulation and inspection of existing kennels within your area to make sure your county is in compliance. This responsibility is outlined on www.fohowv.org.

Puppy mills are nothing more than breeding grounds of disease, despair, and death.⁸ Once we accept that premise, we must support all appropriate measures to shut them down. We must alert our officials whenever we suspect a puppy mill is operating in our community. The dogs in these mills need everyone's help to protect them.

Endnotes

1. “An Advocate’s Guide to Stopping Puppy Mills,” The Humane Society of the United States, http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/pets/puppy_mills/advocate_guide.pdf.
2. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Animal Care Program Inspections of Problematic Dealers,” United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, May 2010, <http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/33002-4-SF.pdf>.
3. “Puppy Mill, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, <http://www.asPCA.org/fightanimal-cruelty/advocacy-center/animal-laws-about-the-issues/puppymill.aspx>.
4. “Detailed Discussion of Commercial Breeders and Puppy Mills,” by Robyn F. Katz, 2008, Animal Legal and Historical Center, <http://www.animallaw.info/articles/dduscommercialbreeders.htm>.
5. “Puppy Mills,” by Cori Menkin, Esq., Learning to Give, <http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper351.html>
6. “Puppy mill - over 1,000 dogs seized Parkersburg, WV (US),” Animal Case Abuse Details, <http://www.pet-abuse.com/cases/14422/WV/US/>.
7. Based on known cases throughout the state.
8. “Puppy Mills—Much worse than you thought,” Federation of Humane Organizations West Virginia, www.fohowv.org.