

The Costs of Midwestern Puppy Mills

Our topics for this week are:

- **Description of Puppy Mill practices and inspections**
- **Locations for most puppy mills**
- **Puppy problems associated with puppy mills**
- **Characteristics of responsible dog breeders**

History

Puppy mills began after World War II as a means of creating income for small farmers. Small wire cages that were used to raise rabbits and chickens during the war were converted into cages for dogs. The dogs were not screened for physical or behavioral quality or being carriers of genetic diseases. For several years Sears and Roebuck sold puppies from puppy mills directly to the public through their catalog. This was gradually replaced by brokers gathering puppies from puppy mills and shipping to pet stores for resale.

Today there are an estimated 10,000 puppy mills in the United States producing more than 2 million puppies per year, but only about 3,000 of the puppy mills are monitored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the federal agency primarily dealing with livestock issues.

Definition and Contrast with Responsible Hobby Breeders

There is no uniform definition of commercial dog breeders. One that is accepted in most states is breeding 20 or more dogs within a year. Another criterion that is often accepted to separate hobby breeders from commercial breeders is breeding more than three breeds of dogs. The American Veterinary Medical Association defines a high volume dog breeder as any person who whelps more than six litters a year or transfers ownership of more than 50 dogs per year.

Commercially bred puppies are generally at high risk of inadequate socialization. Many states do not mandate socialization for commercially bred puppies, and those that do have vague requirements. Interstate shipment of puppies falls under Federal Regulations on the Humane Handling, Care, and Treatment of Dogs and Cats (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 9, Chapter 1), which covers animals that are on display, being shipped interstate, or used in research. However, socialization is not a requirement for interstate shipment, and interstate shipment is permissible as early as 7 weeks of age. Retail pet stores are also not required to socialize puppies.

Dogs obtained from pet stores have significantly more aggressiveness toward humans, including family members and other animals, as well as separation-related issues and inappropriate urination and defecation problems.

Puppy mills keep their breeding females until they cannot be bred and then will kill them. Frequently they are bred at every they come into heat. For many, they are kept in stacked cages and all or part of the bottom is wire to reduce the cleaning maintenance time. The cages are kept outside or in buildings without climate control. The USDA allows cages to be only 6 inches larger than the dog on all sides.

Locations

Most puppy mills are located in Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Kansas, Iowa, and the capital of puppy mills: Missouri.

Problems

Critical socialization of puppies occurs between 4 weeks of age and up to 14 weeks of age. If careful exposure to people who handle dogs gently, gentle other dogs, and a wide range of surroundings during this period does not occur, the neglected puppies will never reach their potential as a companion animal. Problems with behavior will persist throughout life.

Puppy mill puppies are often removed from litters before 8 weeks of age, the period needed to be taught bite inhibition by the mother and littermates. They are soon shipped to broker warehouses receiving high levels of stress or “puppy PTSD”, which may affect their physical health and/or behavior for the rest of their lives.

In addition to socialization problems, puppy mill puppies often have infectious diseases caused by stress and being held near other young dogs in brokers warehouses, in transport vehicles, or in pet stores from a variety of sources.

The USDA only inspects about 2600 of the 10,000 puppy mills in the U.S. As of last year, the USDA had not revoked or penalized one dog breeder under the 1966 Animal Welfare Act in the previous three years. In March 2018, the USDA was sued under the Freedom of Information Act for failing to publicly release information required by the federal Animal Welfare Act.

In 2010, Missouri voters voted for a significant improvement in regulating puppy mills, called Proposition B. After the election, agricultural lobbyists were able to entice the state Senate to override Proposition B and pass a watered down version. For the last 10 year in a row, Missouri has ranked the worst state in the nation for abusive puppy mills by the Humane Society of the United States.

Breeders which identify themselves as commercial breeders are supposed to be inspected by the USDA and Missouri Department of Agriculture. Both inspections need to be more far more frequent with more stringent requirements for breeders. The common practice of responding to violations with off-the-record teachable moments should be replaced with official citations and meaningful fines.

Recommendations

Don't buy dogs from puppy mills! This means do not buy from pet stores, on the internet, or at markets, horse shows, flea markets, and similar gatherings. To minimize future problems and expenses in owning a dog for its entire life, buy purebred dogs, if you do not adopt from an Animal Shelter. Puppy mills now like to breed cross breeds, called "designer dogs" and charge as much or more than purebreds although their overhead costs are lower. These cross breeds may or may not dilute the risk of some inherited problems but they are just as susceptible to socialization problems and infectious disease as other puppies from puppy mills.

Ideally, the seller should have dogs they breed that have completed in dog shows. This ensures good breeding, including early testing for genetic diseases and socialization. A potential puppy buyer should visit the seller and ask to see the cages and kennels as well as the parents of the current litter or at least the mother dog. Breeder who breed more than 20 dogs per year or more than 3 breeds should be avoided.

A voluntary inspection of a breeder's operation has been developed by Purdue University. Satisfactory completion results in becoming "Canine Care Certified". The standards to be met and inspection process appears to be far more stringent than those of the USDA and state agricultural departments. A canine care certified breeder should be a relatively safe source for puppies.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular subjects contact us at atCBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Puppy mills are inadequately regulated and inspected by the USDA and by most state Departments of Agriculture.**
- 2. Puppies from puppy mills are deprived of socialization by mother dogs and littermates and gentle handling by humans resulting in training problems as adults.**
- 3. The risks of transmissible disease and inherited disorders are higher in puppy mill puppies than in puppies from responsible breeders.**

Abby says it is time to wrap up this episode.

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. You might also be interested in my *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*. Both are available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: **www.betteranimalhandling.com**

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.