



CRUEL DOG BUNCHERS HOPEFULLY A THING OF THE PAST



The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has recently announced that it will no longer fund research on dogs procured from pounds, breeders, and other so-called random sources. The move is in response to a National Academy of Sciences report, which concluded that dogs acquired from such places were not critical for biomedical research, and that using them could damage the reputation of the research enterprise with the public.

For years, Class B dealers or “bunchers” as they are known in the trade, sold animals to research institutions that they obtained from dog pounds, trade day sales, dog auctions, and smaller dog dealers. This system of obtaining dogs for research was often plagued with abuse and even stolen dogs.

Missouri has a long, sordid history of dog dealing and for many years was one of the major sources of dogs acquired by bunchers to be re-sold to research. The state was rife with dog auctions and dog swaps where shady characters would trade dogs for nefarious purposes. The most notorious site in Missouri for dog bunchers was the infamous “Rutledge” dog auction and trade day sale located in Scotland County in Northeast Missouri. Dog bunchers from across the country came to Rutledge to pick up “cheap” dogs to re-sell to research laboratories. One of the most infamous bunchers was Sam Esposito who traveled from Pennsylvania in a tractor trailer and would load up over 300 dogs from Missouri and would truck them to some of the most prestigious research laboratories on the East Coast.

Esposito and other bunchers frequently violated the law by acquiring animals from fraudulent sources and abusing and neglecting their animals. One buncher investigated by our Executive Director, Bob Baker, was found to be housing his dogs with no food or water. This particular buncher attempted to re-sell his dogs within 3 – 5 days of acquiring them and therefore refused to waste feed on them. Those that didn’t sell starved to death. Baker discovered skeletons of dogs chained to dog houses.

Many of the animals obtained by bunchers were often stolen pets, strays or animals obtained under false pretenses and deception through “free to good home” ads.

Fortunately, due to the passage of a state law in Missouri making it a felony to steal a dog along with stricter regulations by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, there are no longer any bunchers actively operating in Missouri and only a handful left nationwide.

Hopefully, NIH’s new policy of refusing to fund the procurement of dogs from Class B dealers will reduce that number of bunchers to zero nationwide.

Random source dogs and cats can still be used by researchers and educators who don’t rely on government money. This is the reason that Congress needs to pass the Pet Safety and Protection Act, which would effectively outlaw the use of all random source dogs and cats in the United States. In the meantime, tougher regulations have shrunk the number of Class B dealers from about 200 in the 1970s to just a handful today, with none in Missouri.

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