



MISSOURI ALLIANCE FOR ANIMAL LEGISLATION FALL 2013 NEWSLETTER

Welfare Swindlers + Tax Cheats + Consumer Fraud + Animal Neglect = Puppy Mills



Reputable dog breeders have, for years, argued that there is little money to be made from breeding dogs and insisted it should only be pursued as a hobby or to improve breed standards. This, of course, raises the question, “Why are there are so many puppy mills if dog breeding is not a profitable enterprise?” Having spent the past 33 years investigating commercial dog breeders, I can easily answer that question. In contrast to responsible breeders, who seldom make a profit, many commercial dog breeders make large sums of money breeding dogs, but do so only by sacrificing the health and welfare of their breeding animals. My visits to hundreds of puppy mills revealed that the single most distinguishing characteristic of puppy mill operators is their desire to produce puppies at minimal cost and effort regardless of what is best for the animals. The only apparent concern for the dogs’ welfare is their desire for a high enough survival rate to ensure a profit. The breeding animals are viewed merely as machines for producing puppies.

Puppy mills, however, do not stop at cheating on the health and welfare of their dogs to gain a quick buck. They have continually sought out other unethical and sometimes illegal practices to enrich their coffers.

Exposes over the years by the news media, animal welfare groups, consumer advocates, and state and federal agencies have revealed that many puppy mills have engaged in a host of questionable practices. Welfare fraud appears to be one way breeders use to scam the system. Over the years, I have come across numerous puppy mill breeders who, despite being able to care for scores of breeding dogs, are collecting federal disability payments. Interestingly, I have heard the same comments from veteran USDA inspectors and AKC inspectors. They have reported that a surprising number of puppy mill operators they come across are collecting disability. This came to mind while attending a recent trial of a dog breeder who, in spite of caring for over 100 breeding dogs and the many puppies associated with so many adult breeding animals, admitted on the stand that she is collecting disability.



Sick puppies from Missouri puppy mills have led to a ban on the sale of dogs in Los Angeles

Several state agencies across the country, as well as the IRS, have reported that commercial dog breeders have underreported their income on federal and state tax returns. Additionally, many were not paying the state sales tax on puppies sold or were vastly underreporting such sales. Many dog breeders here in Missouri responded in dismay when the Missouri Department of Agriculture started requiring licensees to provide Missouri Tax I. D. numbers and complete a “Tax Compliance Worksheet” when renewing their state commercial breeder’s license. Interestingly, a comparison of the number of adult breeding dogs listed on federal inspection reports with the number of puppies sold often reveals a sharp contrast. For example, one breeder with over 100 adult breeding dogs reported to the state sales of less than 100 puppies a year. When factoring the average litter size and average number of litters per year along with the percentage of female dogs, a breeding facility of this size should be producing at least 500 puppies per year. Such underreporting of puppy sales can be used to falsify federal and state income tax returns, applications for disability and welfare benefits, payment of state sales tax, and state licensing fees which are based on the number of puppies sold.

In addition to these unethical and illegal practices, there is the massive consumer fraud perpetrated by puppy mills. This is apparent from the countless complaints from consumers who have purchased sick and genetically defective puppies from pet stores which originated from puppy mills. Almost monthly there is a news story somewhere in the country about the sale of sick dogs at pet stores. These complaints are so prevalent that over 20 states have enacted puppy lemon laws to protect consumers. Some cities, including most recently the City of San Diego, have banned the sale of dogs in pet stores due to the massive number of consumer complaints. When the city of Los Angeles banned the sale of dogs in their pet stores, Missouri was specifically mentioned as the source of over half the sick dogs being sold to LA consumers. The Better Business Bureaus of Missouri found the commercial dog breeding business to be one of the worst businesses they have encountered. The BBB reported they have received a “large number of complaints from consumers” due to “ill puppies” and because of “the expenditure of money for veterinarian fees by consumers who unknowingly bought sick puppies.” The BBB stated “the resolution rate of those complaints is well below the national average for resolving complaints.”

It recently came to our attention that a breeder here in Missouri was continuing to breed dozens of adult dogs despite the breeder’s own veterinarian refusing to certify the dogs as fit for breeding due to genetic defects. This will, without a doubt, result in many puppies with painful genetic defects being passed on to unwitting consumers. Over the years I have questioned many breeders on why they chose to sell wholesale via pet stores rather than directly to the consumer where they can receive 3 to 5 times the amount of money that they receive from the pet stores. The answer is always the same, “I don’t have to deal with complaints.” A consumer half way across the country who purchases a sick or crippled dog will have little recourse to the breeder living hundreds of miles away in Missouri.

It has been a practice for years for some commercial breeders to acquire breed stock by posing as a family promising to give a dog a good home. In fact, a prominent breeder here in Missouri was recently caught doing so. Just last month, an industry veterinarian at a meeting of Missouri dog breeders complained about unscrupulous breeders knowingly selling diseased breeding dogs to rescues by certifying them as “healthy” via deceptive means.

Why do we mention all of the above? Many legislators have alleged that our efforts have destroyed a valuable industry and are responsible for closing down many family businesses which are vital to the state’s economy. **The fact is this has always been an industry plagued by serious problems and has attracted people looking to make a quick buck regardless of the consequences for the dogs, the consumers, and the public taxpayers.**



A closed Missouri puppy mill

This is an industry which has long been in need of reform. We are thankful our efforts have, no doubt, closed down the worst of the puppy mills in the state. Thanks to our new puppy mill law and subsequent increased enforcement efforts, it has now become more difficult for breeders to make a quick buck off their dogs. We are hoping the Legislature, as well as the remaining dog breeders in the state, will welcome the transformation of the industry. This will unquestionably benefit everyone and, most especially, the dogs who are so deserving of humane care and treatment.

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