



MISSOURI ALLIANCE FOR ANIMAL LEGISLATION

E-NEWS

E-PUPPY MILLS FACE DOUBLE SCRUTINY

USDA Vows to Regulate Internet Sellers

The U. S. Department of Agriculture recently confirmed to the Alliance that its proposed regulations to revise the definition of a "retail pet store" should be in place by year-end. The new definition would close a loophole that has threatened the health and humane treatment of breeding dogs and their off-spring sold sight unseen over the Internet and via phone and mail based businesses.

While Internet sellers of dogs require a state license under Missouri law, this will be the first time that retail sellers of dogs will be required to meet federal humane standards of care for their dogs. Currently, Internet sellers are exempt from the federal Animal Welfare Act which only covers breeders for the wholesale market such as those who breed dogs for pet stores. These changes would ensure that breeding animals used to produce puppies for the retail market are monitored for their health and humane treatment. This new regulation will help concentrate USDA's regulatory efforts on those facilities that present the greatest risk of noncompliance with the regulations.

USDA admits that their current definition of "retail pet store" was developed over 40 years ago and predates the Internet. USDA stated that some breeders selling pets are currently taking advantage of a loophole that improperly exempts them from the basic requirements of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The new rule will close this loophole, ensuring animals sold over the Internet and via phone- and mail-based businesses are better monitored for their overall health and humane treatment. More importantly, the new regulations will help ensure the humane treatment of the breeding dogs confined in such e-puppy mills.

All the details of the new regulations have not been announced but the Alliance has learned that dog breeders with more than 4 intact adult females will have to be licensed even if they sell just one dog over the Internet. This will add an extra protection to dogs in Missouri as both state and

federal inspectors will be able to enforce humane standards of care over commercial dog breeding operations.

In addition, USDA has recently instructed its inspectors to photograph all observed violations of the Animal Welfare Act in an effort to better document cases. They have also been instructed to report violations of state laws to the appropriate authorities and have been told to place a greater emphasis on the health of the animals and increase compliance with requirements for health certificates.

PUPS Act Re-introduced in Congress

At the same time that USDA is declaring its intention to regulate Internet sellers, Senators Durbin and Vitter have introduced a bill to regulate online puppy sales. The Puppy Uniform Protection and Safety Act (PUPS) would require all breeders that sell more than 50 dogs a year to be licensed and to undergo inspections to ensure dogs are receiving proper care.

Senator David Vitter (R-LA) stated, "I was alarmed by the USDA Inspector General report that exposed inhumane treatment of dogs, especially abusive breeding practices. I applaud USDA's work to close loopholes that unscrupulous breeders exploited with Internet sales, and the PUPS Act introduced by Senator Durbin and me will help ensure that puppies are treated humanely and bred in safe and sanitary facilities and that consumer can purchase healthy pets for their families."

Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) stated, "The media regularly reports stories about dogs rescued from substandard facilities - where dogs are housed in stacked wire cages and seriously ill and injured dogs are routinely denied access to veterinary care. Online dog sales have contributed to the rise of these sad cases. This bipartisan bill requires breeders who sell more than 50 dogs a year directly to the public to obtain a license from the USDA and ensures that the dogs receive proper care."

This surely is a double win for the dogs as both Congress and USDA are vowing to regulate the Internet sale of dogs. Seldom do we see such national attention on the plight of puppy mill dogs.

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