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**Puppy Mills and the Mass Production of Pedigree Pets**



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By Yahaira Cespedes February 15, 2012 at 09:17AM / (29) comments

**Puppy Mills: America's Cruel Secret**

Pet stores exude an inviting environment designed to show you healthy and happy for-sale pets. If you buy the idyllic scene of frisky, clean puppies, you will pay good money for a pedigree. But would you still pay good money for the same puppies if you saw that the breeder kept them in cramped, filthy cages their whole lives? What pet stores won't show you is where the puppies come from, and most come from puppy mills.

The pet trade is so iconic to American culture that Patti Page's 1953 hit, *How Much Is That Dogie in The Window*, is still a popular tune today. But the song has also become synonymous with the terrible practices of puppy mills, also known as backyard breeders. Unlike Patti Page's upbeat lyrics, bringing home a sick puppy that was bred in a puppy mill is nothing to sing about.

**What is a Puppy Mill?**

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) defines a puppy mill as "a large-scale commercial dog breeding operation where profit is given priority over the well-being of the dogs."

The conditions of dogs housed in puppy mills have been consistently documented as appalling. Many undercover investigative reports exist detailing how bitches and studs are forced to breed until their deteriorated health renders them unprofitable to keep alive.

As the ASPCA goes on to mention, the resulting litters do not fare any better:

"Breeding at puppy mills is performed without consideration of genetic quality. This results in generations of dogs with unchecked hereditary defects."

Already born at a disadvantage, the puppies are then introduced to life on the mill. Perpetually kept in cramped and filthy rabbit cages, puppies are only cleaned up when the time comes to ship them to their final destination — usually a pet store. When the bitches and studs that sired the puppies are no longer capable of producing litters, they are put down.

**Why Doesn't the Government Shut Down Puppy Mills?**

The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) was passed by Congress in 1966, and is currently regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):

"AWA requires that minimum standards of care and treatment be provided for certain animals bred for commercial sale, used in research, transported commercially, or exhibited to the public."

But according to the USDA, puppy mills do not fall into the category of commercial sale. Inspection reports by the HSUS show that USDA-licensed breeders frequently get away with violations of the AWA. In other words, the practice of not providing bred puppies with basic necessities and veterinary care is not illegal.

**Supply and Demand**

Although the HSUS estimates that there are more than 10,000 puppy mills currently in operation, most mill breeders operate in secret. The main reason these operations stay hidden from the public eye is that most are run by the Amish and Mennonite community in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

As documented by watchdog groups, concerned citizens, and animal rights organizations, mill breeders don't view the substandard conditions in which breeding dogs are kept as out of the ordinary. To puppy millers, dogs are considered livestock.

Unlike livestock, however, the only care puppies receive is a quick clean up the day they are shipped out (usually handled by a middleman) for sale. By the time a store-bought puppy receives its first real veterinary visit, its poor health is already at the chronic stage.

**Puppy Mills in the Media**

Currently, the most prominent depiction of the struggle to raise public awareness about puppy mill breeders is the movie, *Madonna of the Mills*. A labor-of-love collaboration from director Andy Nibley and his wife, producer Kelly Colbert, the film features collaboration assistant Laura Flynn Amato's ongoing efforts to rescue bitches and studs that can no longer produce money for the farmers.

To date, she has saved more than 2,000 dogs.

In a recent telephone interview with the author, Mr. Nibley mentioned that the decision to make the movie occurred when his wife adopted Maisy, a Cocker Spaniel, from Rawhide Rescue. Maisy had survived a procedure commonly performed on dogs by puppy millers — her voice box had been crushed with a pipe to debark her. She is one of the dogs featured in the movie, which is currently being shown on HBO OnDemand. It can also be purchased on the *Madonna of the Mills* website.

**A Support Network**

Main Line Animal Rescue, a strong supporter of the movie, was featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* after founder Bill Smith posted a plea to her on a billboard she would see during her morning commute. Main Line Animal Rescue has also been featured on *Nightline*, and in *People* and *Newsweek* magazines in their ongoing effort to raise awareness about puppy mills.

Laura Flynn Amato continues to work tirelessly to rescue breeder dogs from puppy mills, and operates through No More Tears Rescue in Staten Island, NY.

**Be Informed**

After learning about the horrific practice of puppy mill farming, most people's natural instinct would be to an animal shelter or the store where their puppy was bought from. Because many puppies in pet stores come from puppy mills (or backyard breeders), when questioned, the likely response will be a denial. However, Mr. Nibley also cautioned that puppy mill breeders have proliferated on the Internet, so pet stores are not the only places that are dealing in the puppy mill trade.

Adopted from Main Line Animal Rescue, Oprah Winfrey's website provides a comprehensive checklist prior to purchasing a puppy. Among other tips, the list suggests to:

- Consider adoption
- Do your homework before buying from a pet store
- See where your puppy was born and bred
- Get an animal locally
- Share your puppy mill story with the ASPCA or the HSUS
- Speak out to your legislator

If finding a dog from a breeder is important to you, make sure you find a reputable dog breeder.

**What NOT To Do**

DO NOT head to the nearest pet store and buy a puppy with the intent of rescuing them. This only feeds money into the puppy mill industry and continues the vicious cycle. Until legislation is passed that makes this practice illegal, adoption and awareness is the best solution.

If you make the decision to give up your pet, take care to screen the potential adoptee. There is a market for obtaining animals to use for bait in dog fighting, as well as to sell for medical research.

Although many dedicated people and organizations devote their efforts towards ending the practice of puppy mill farming, it is important to mention that breeding animals for profit doesn't stop with just dogs. Cats, birds, and exotic animals like ferrets are also bred for commercial sale, and with just as little consideration for their well-being.

During the three-year course of making *Madonna of the Mills*, Mr. Nibley tracked down singer Patti Page, who now resides in California. She collaborated with HSUS to put out a new version of the hit song to convey an uplifting message, titled, *Do You See That Dogie in the Shelter?* Ms. Page's revised lyrics will be used to help raise awareness in mid-September, on Puppy Mill Awareness Day.

**Additional Resources**

ABC Nightline - Puppy Mill Article  
ASPCA  
Humane Society of the United States  
Madonna of the Mills Movie  
Main Line Animal Rescue  
No More Tears Rescue  
Oprah Winfrey Show - Puppy Mill Investigation  
Puppy Mill Awareness Day  
Rawhide Animal Rescue  
Image: SOMMAI / via Shutterstock

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most of my breedings DO occur in the "backyards". They are not necessarily equated with "puppy mills", yet in Illinois if you have but three intact females - EVER consider it a "commercial"? Or a puppy mill? In Illinois, dogs are not bred. Are these fine owners included in your statistics? Should they be? Really?

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May I ask where you obtained your statistics?  
Most shelters in the NorthEast are importin...

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### 3 whre will dogs come from by [alicia](#)

They often cry Don't shop.. adopt.. well here is the problem. If you go to a shelter and they say "we don't have a dog from the shelter.. they should sit in the van and wait for someone to come and take them home". Then you go to another shelter and they say "we don't have a dog.. any dog.. then they should take the bus home". Why should they be allowed to "shop"? They should, build "playrooms" and ship in 'sellable' dogs. Go out the back door dead is exactly what they do. Product and get rid of "merchandise" that does not sell... cruel...

We cannot produce enough dogs for people. Some groups like the HSUS do not want 1. Breeding of "pure breeds". they are "inbred" who show dogs are only interested in winning. 2. "backyard breeders (what ever they are) because they breed dogs and they 'throw two dogs together to make puppies'. 3. "puppy mill" dogs.. because they are sick and the owner are greedy and profit driven. 4. "mixed bred" dog because they are the result of fall into the term "backyard breeder" 5. "Designer dogs" because they are not pure bred and are termed "backyard breeders"

What do they want? 'responsible breeders'

what are they?  
breeders who sell all dogs on castration controlled breeding. breeders who only breed a female or male. their stud dogs, breeder who only keep X number of dogs (two, three) etc.. in other words very few dogs produced. dogs.. a very limited gene pool which will eventually die out. Right now the UK has 25 breeds on the "breed register". Setter was just added. Two more are on the 'watch list' that can reproduce and even fewer people under 30 are "allowed" to breed dogs.  
Every 'puppy mill' dog that is "rescued" is castrated. Does that help dogs? Many of the "rescued" dogs are not spayed or neutered anyway so they don't add to "pet overpopulation".

I would ask you.. if only the above "responsible breeders" exist, where will people get dogs? How much will they pay for the joy of owning a pet? Or should only certain people be allowed to own dogs who are "those people"

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### 4 petfinder by [alicia](#)

is the largest internet pet store on the web.

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### 5 misinformation by [alicia](#)

If you simply must buy from a breeder, look for parents for no genetic diseases, and insist on seeing the dogs on site, you are dealing with a backyard breeder.

say a poster

HUH?/ most good breeders do not have both males and females. If you are looking for a stud dog, the are show dogs'in the shelter you should know that they are not studs. If you are looking for a dog that they do not own and that does not live there, also dogs die when a pipe is shoved down their throat. who know nothing about raising dogs.

and stud dogs do not need to be "forced to breed". mandatory castration will tell you stud gos won't breed. bitch is season.. so how can you have it both ways? You are talking to doesn't it.. one say dogs have to do anything to breed.. as long as it meet the 'age' requirement

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now, that a person can not even purchase a dog without being subject to more scrutiny than a dog. I mean, if you are buying a dog, are there people out here other than the breeders who know how to take care of dogs, know how to take care of dogs properly? Dogs are not irresponsible and inhumane. Being one of the retarded, too stupid to know how to take care of dogs, because things might not be done to fit some Mixed breed dogs make great pets and are all good dogs unless an irresponsible breeder is not testing factors. There is room for responsible small rescue dogs. Many more dogs could be in homes finding a dog a good home, not making money start on that, I do know that it costs money to do it. I am talking about over charging to the point of a good home to afford to rescue or adopt.) A person needs income in order to love a dog or give it proper population... it is not going to happen because they should. I am all about the humane treatment place with cruel people in it. That isn't going to take it one dog at a time... and stop being

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## 10 Ashamed of PET MD

by [A](#)

I used to credit PET MD with being a reputable breeder. I still hold that opinion. This article is filled with misinformation. There are good, respectable breeders who do produce healthy, well-socialized puppies.

And be sure of this - the word "adopt" is misleading. When you buy a dog from a shelter - that's essentially "Rescuing" dogs has gotten to be such a big business. IMPORTING stray dogs from other countries

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Great comments! We're getting to a point where people are starting to realize that they "sell" dogs. Importing strays from foreign countries to fill their shelters in some areas of the US. It's a dangerous practice that contributes to the horrible pet over-population problem. I hope people will stop bringing dogs overseas to fill their shelters?

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## 11 so

by [alicia](#)

we have narrowed it down  
no "puppy mill" dogs  
no "purebred" dogs  
no "backyard breeders. so where will the dogs come from?  
The majority of pets are obtained from acquired sources.  
20 percent of dogs are purchased from breeders.  
are adopted from shelters and rescues. (Source: Ralston Purina)  
More than 20 percent of people who leave dogs at shelters do so  
(Source: NCPPSP)

READ THIS CAREFULLY 20% of dogs in the U.S. are adopted from shelters and rescues.

Facts about Pet Ownership in the U.S.:

About 63 percent of all households in the United States own pets. (Source: American Veterinary Medical Association)  
About 75 million dogs and about 85 million cats. (Source: Pet Food Institute)  
According to the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy, about 65 percent of pet owners acquire their pets from breeders. The majority of pets are obtained from acquired sources. 20 percent of dogs are purchased from breeders, 15 percent are adopted from shelters and rescues, and 2 to 10 percent are found as strays. (Source: Ralston Purina and NCPPSP)

These stats are directly from the ASPCA

2-10 percent are purchased from pet stores ..  
purchased from another source.. so if "puppy mills" are supplying 90-98% of any purchased dogs.what about the "puppy mills"?.

so if we delete all of these sources.. where would the dogs come from?

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## 12 AR's use of puppy mills

The statistics do not support the animal rights activists' claims. These animal rights cult members want to end puppy mills by spreading slander and the images of a few to emotionalize the public.

The one thing all those parroting the official seem to forget one thing..... animals will no conditions are not right for the offspring to s has this natural means of birth control. Howe to know better than God. They also know ev owned a dog nor studied any animal care pro I am a breeder. I am responsible for the anim responsible for the puppies that result from A while she was in heat. I am not responsible f breeding his dam and the disbelief from the mother!!!! With all the comments being thre breeders on level with Satan should look in t breeders alone

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