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Canine Commercial breeding establishments (puppy mills) are defined as inhumane facilities that disregard the health of the animals for financial gains by the United States Humane Society ¹. Puppy mills came into existence shortly after World War II, because farmers thought that it was an opportunity “to make money in the face of widespread failures” and as pet stores began putting puppies inside the stores, the demand widely increased ². In the beginning the USDA encouraged farmers to raise the puppies as “cash crops” and they began to do so by overlooking the well being of the dogs ³. As of 2015 there were an estimated 10,000 operating puppy mills producing over two million puppies from an estimated 174,000 breeding females ⁴ in the United States.

What are the risks of these facilities?

These facilities pose significant, long lasting effects psychologically and physically on the animals. Psychologically “dogs maintained in these environments develop extreme and persisting fears, possible learning deficits, and often show difficulty in coping successfully with normal existence” ⁵. Puppy mills emphasize quantity over quality with no regard to crowded conditions which cause diseases to spread quickly and easily ⁶. These facilities also have no regard to the temperament of the dogs they’re breeding. Due to continual confinement “animals... suffer from chronic anxiety, social isolation, inadequate stimulation, and lack of physical exercise” ⁷. Commercial breeding facilities have poor sanitation, food, and water. Many times there is inadequate waste control forcing the animals to be in constant contact to their own waste and that of other animals ⁸. Female breeding dogs are bred way too frequently, with no

concern to their health, and when it reaches the point where they can no longer reproduce they are often killed ⁹.

Many of these facilities do not employ proper breeding techniques, subsequently the animals often have health issues such as: epilepsy, deafness, respiratory disorders, heart and kidney diseases, and musculoskeletal disorders ¹⁰. On top of that when the dogs arrive to their new homes they often have illnesses such as: pneumonia, mange, fleas, ticks, heartworm, kennel cough, intestinal issues, parvovirus, and many more ¹¹. As an example, in an eighty dog bust in North Carolina it was discovered that 50% of the dogs had parasites, 23% had ear infections, 15% had a severe dry eye conditions, and all of those older than 18 months had some form of gum disease ¹².

What are the current laws?

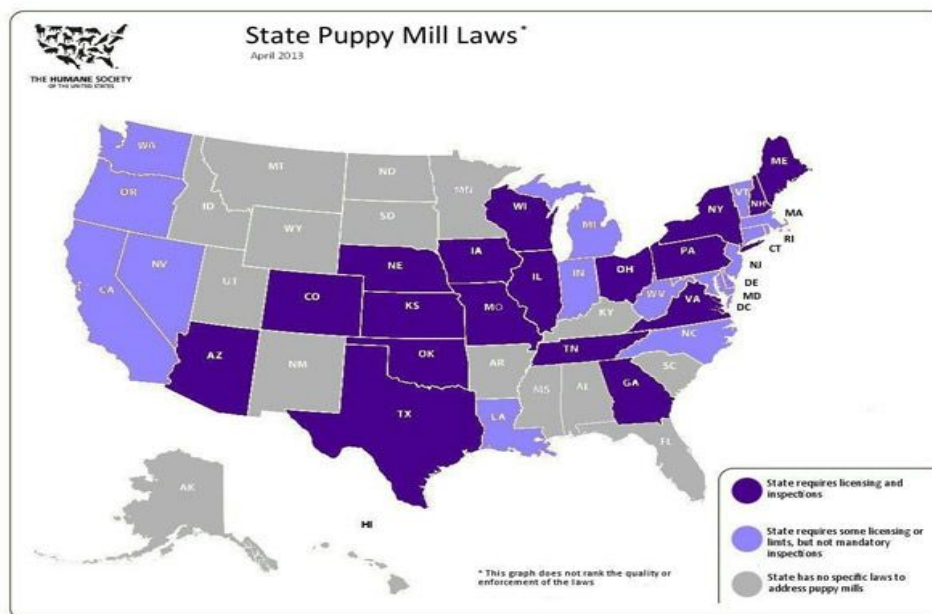


Figure 1.1 puppy mill laws ¹³

As seen above many states do not have laws against puppy mills, or do not have strict laws against the practice. America as a whole has a law that was created in 1966, The Animal Welfare act, which set minimum standards for animal welfare, and dictates that large commercial breeding facilities need to be inspected regularly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) ¹⁴. However there are many failures and loopholes to the system. The law only requires wholesale operations to be licensed and defines wholesale operations as those that “breed or broker animals for resale—to pet stores for example—or sell puppies sight-unseen” ¹⁵. These laws ignore operations that sell directly to the public, they are not required to adhere to the Animal Welfare Act even though they could potentially produce just as many puppies as their counterparts. Most laws are designated at a state level, and are highly inadequate, therefore many large commercial breeders get away with animal cruelty due to the faults of the system. As seen in the graph below of Michigan wholesale operations, breeders are often allowed to have multiple violations without losing their licenses ¹⁶.

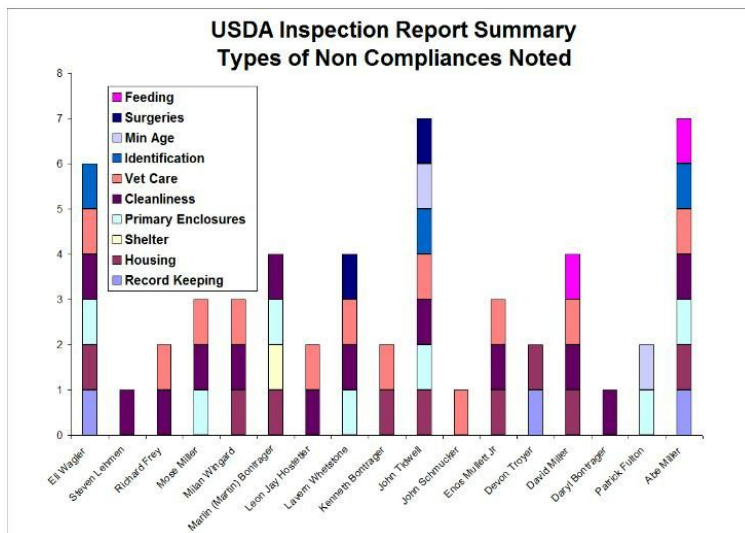


Figure 1.2 violations record ¹⁷

As of 2008 only 26 states had any laws regulating commercial breeding¹⁸, and those that do “address sanitation, housing, food and water requirements, the governing agency, and inspections; few address veterinary care and the humane treatment of dogs, ventilation, and exercise”¹⁹. Most states define commercial breeding, commercial kennel, breeding facility, retail pet store, and other relative terms differently²⁰. Another problem that happens often with branches of the government is underfunding and understaffing, which causes some operations to fall the cracks and go a year without inspection.

What can we do to stop this?

Currently there are many movements aiming to ban puppy mills or to stop them from being so profitable in our society. The human society has a movement called the “Puppy-friendly Pet store initiative” which aims to have community members help their pet store implement policies where they help adopt out homeless animals instead²¹. By utilizing these types of movements and other public outreach methods the general public is becoming much more educated about the subject and the profitability of these operations is decreasing. Approximately 1.2 million dogs are euthanized each year in kill shelters²². One option would be to incentivize all pet stores to feature homeless dogs instead of puppies. A possible funding solution would be to provide subsidies to these operations by redirecting the money from kill shelters. By making more of these animals accessible to the public there becomes a bigger chance that they will be adopted. The public may also contact their local congressmen and other legislators to inform them of their concerns²³. If more people contact their representatives the local and federal governments will be forced to address this issue.

A major opponent of these regulations is the American Kennel Club, as of 2015 they have fought against over one hundred and fifty proposed legislations²⁴. The AKC “Government Relations Department (GR) is dedicated to protecting the rights of all dog owners, promoting responsible dog ownership and ensuring that laws governing dog ownership and breeding are reasonable, enforceable and non-discriminatory”²⁵. However there have been some severe cases of abuse found within the AKC breeders. One such case a man was convicted with 91 cases of animal cruelty and charged with 30 years in prison, and “Under oath, he testified he felt confident he was obeying all laws and the stricter AKC rules, since an AKC inspector had twice recently found him to be in compliance”²⁶.

Conclusion:

Currently the laws regarding puppy mills are highly inadequate and lead to many suffering animals in our country. By working with all facets of dog breeding and purchasing to create equal laws that don't impose on the rights of the public. But laws are not the only way to get rid of puppy mills. If pet stores are incentivized to help homeless animals, they will no longer need to purchase from puppy mills. Subsequently, if the public becomes more informed about the issues with puppy mills then they will no longer buy from these establishments and the profits will decrease severely. Decreasing the amount and cruelty of puppy mills will create a safer environment for animals throughout the country and give good homes to many dogs that would be euthanized otherwise.

Endnotes

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