

Puppy mills and the cult of consumerism: The confluence of cruelty, greed, and pain

Your next “pure bred” or “designer” dog is just one click of the mouse away. For the right price, you can buy any dog – whichever breed, size, age, or color you want, and have him or her delivered right to your door. It’s the epitome of one-click consumerism, but is it also the confluence of cruelty, greed, and pain? While millions of animals suffer and die in shelters nationwide, “choosy” consumers can purchase dogs who fit their specific criteria without having to leave the comfort of their living rooms. But what happens after you click “buy?” How is this dog going to arrive at your doorstep – and where did he or she come from? Were they living in a pampered home, as Internet advertisements are apt to claim, or did your expensive new pup come from a far more likely source: a puppy mill?

Despite record-high impoundment and euthanasia rates of animals in shelters nationwide, puppy mills continue to produce dogs in unprecedented numbers. According to the Humane Society of the United States ([HSUS](#)), puppy mills are commercial breeding facilities that house dogs in wire cages, mass-producing puppies and vastly contributing to pet overpopulation. While the wire cages are intended to allow feces to drop down to the ground below, when cages are stacked, excrement falls onto the animals below. Often, fecal matter is the only “solid” surface that these animals stand on, and they suffer from overgrown nails, parasite infestations, infectious disease, rodents, and maggots. But because puppy mills are typically hidden away in rural areas, this suffering goes undetected – and online puppy sales ads provide no indication of what really happens at puppy mills.

At a puppy mill, one mother dog alone can produce 500 puppies in her lifetime. While many jurisdictions, including [Chicago](#), Illinois; Palm Beach, Florida; El Paso, Texas; Brick, New Jersey; and Los Angeles, California; have enacted retail pet sale bans, this hasn’t deterred the growth of puppy mills. Puppy mill operations have taken to the Internet to sell their animals, where slick websites and dolled-up photos have taken the place of pet store windows. In years past, puppy mills used pet stores to pawn their animals to uninformed consumers; today, the platform of choice is the Internet, where puppy mill operators can hide their cruelty by remaining behind the computer screen.

Puppy mills are problematic both for their inherent cruelty and for their considerable contribution to the nation’s pet overpopulation issue. Pet overpopulation is severe in the United States; according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ([ASPCA](#)), every year, more than 2.7 million healthy, adoptable animals are already euthanized in shelters nationwide. Every day, more than 7,000 animals take the long walk to the needle – 7,000 animals who entered shelters through no fault of their own, and who will leave the shelter in body bags. Yet puppy mills continue to churn out animals in production-line fashion, sending out puppy after puppy with each click of the mouse.

Puppy mills often advertise themselves online as “small breeding operations” or “family businesses,” but instead, they house and sell hundreds or even thousands of animals of various breeds. Puppy mills are typified by rows upon rows of cages crammed with dogs whose only purpose in life is to produce more dogs. These animals receive no loving care or attention from humans, and often struggle to adjust to loving environments when they are later rescued. Many puppy mill dogs have never heard a kind word or had the paws of their feet touch the grass. They can sometimes see people, when their puppies are confiscated; and they can see the ground from their outdoor cages, but they’re stacked one on top of another. Puppy mill dogs, who are typically housed outdoors, are continuously exposed to the elements. They’re forced to live in their own urine and excrement; and their eyes, ears, and reproductive organs often suffering from raging, untreated infections.

Puppy mill dogs who are housed indoors don’t fare much better; while they aren’t subjected to constant wind, rain, sun, or snow, they are besieged with the ammonia generated by the urine of hundreds of other

dogs, their ears blasted with the screams and cries of fellow lonely animals. Puppy mill dogs' coats are often matted and caked with excrement, impeding their movement and causing skin infections. Upper respiratory viruses are commonplace, and veterinary care is infrequent, at best, even for the female dogs who produce an average of two litters every year until their bodies simply give out.

Puppy mill mothers frequently suffer from prolapsed uteruses and severe infections and produce close to 500 puppies during their reproductive careers. Imagine one dog producing 500 babies – and now picture the hundreds of other dogs at the same puppy mill, also producing 500 babies over their lifetimes. It's no wonder that more than 7,000 animals lose their lives every day at shelters, and when these breeders, who have earned their owners tens of thousands of dollars, have outlived their "usefulness," they're discarded to provide room for dogs who can continue to produce more dogs.

Puppy mill dogs are notoriously unhealthy and often suffer from myriad health issues due to inbreeding, neglect, inhumane care, and unsanitary conditions. Despite this, they're marketed as "purebred" or "designer dogs" to unsuspecting consumers who don't know about – or don't ask about – their histories. Puppy mills are the worst of modern consumerism; they are the confluence of cruelty, greed, and pain. But consumer education and advocate action can diminish the demand for puppy mill dogs. Countless purebred and designer dogs who were once sold for hundreds or thousands of dollars await new homes at shelters nationwide. Consumers have to reconsider where their dogs come from; choose to adopt, and not shop; learn more about puppy mills; and take action to end cruelty, whenever possible. For when action and education synthesize, true change can occur.