

# How Much is that Puppy in the Window?

## The Truth Behind Puppy Mills

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Last year, we took in hundreds of abused animals from puppy mills all over the United States. These dogs, most of them purebred, had never left their cages, touched green grass or the soft ground, or felt the loving touch of a human hand. They'd certainly never been to a vet, or even a groomer, as many had horrific physical ailments, some even had to have their matted fur cut to release them from their filthy cages.

It's hard to believe that these same animals, victims in the greed and often, mental illness that makes humans neglect or do horrible things to animals, were the breeding stock used to produce puppies sold on the internet or through pet stores across the country.

And it's not just puppies either. Often there are cats on these properties, or horses and other livestock, all pretty much kept in similar terrible conditions. We even had a rescue last year in which twelve guinea pigs, almost at the point of starvation, were rescued along with dozens of purebred Lhasas, Pomeranians and Pekinese. In the past few years, hundreds of these so-called "puppy mills" have been closed down, their owners put out of business hopefully forever, and sometimes, when we're lucky, prosecuted for animal abuse.

We live in a very responsible city. Here on the Hill, we're in the epicenter of equality and justice. And yet, so many responsible people still don't realize that every time they consider buying a dog from an ad on the internet, a pet store, a newspaper classified, or a breeder they don't know, means they're financing puppy mills, mass commercial breeding operations that put profit above the well-being of the animals they're sorely using.

These operations are shockingly horrible, especially the ones we see in which animals have been kept in filthy cages for years, never to know human compassion or love, and simply discarded when they are no longer profitable--after producing hundreds of thousands of puppies which further contribute to the overpopulation problem we're already dealing with.

We have an Animal Welfare Act in this country. And the USDA licenses and inspects these breeding operations. The problem is simply that it's impossible to keep up with the thousands of these operations nation-wide. And there are loopholes which keep the government inspectors out of these places. One is to sell directly to the consumer which puts a whole new nasty light on the phrase "buyer beware."

And there are still pet stores who sell animals. According to the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), nearly 1/3 of the 11,000 pet stores in this country (some of which are even in our metro area—Just Puppies and Petland, for instance), still sell puppies. Many more sell fish, birds and small exotic animals, another issue in itself. And please, if you see those Beta fish in cups used for show in a business, tell the proprietor how distasteful using an animal for decoration really is.

So, how do you avoid this?

First of all, consider a shelter. In this country, 3-4 million dogs and cats are euthanized every year. With that in mind, it's hard to imagine that no more 15% of all pets come from shelters. Why is that? One misconception may be that you can't adopt a purebred dog from an animal shelter. In fact, it's estimated that more than 25% of all dogs in a shelter are actually purebred dogs. I can vouch for this in my shelter alone, in which we easily have dozens of purebred dogs and puppies at any one time. There's much to be said for hybrid vigor, however, and those mixed breeds are absolutely wonderful dogs, so looking for the purebred Holy Grail may be a bit short-sighted.

And, of course, a good shelter will support you all along the way—before, during and after the adoption. In addition, shelter dogs are often spayed and neutered, examined by a veterinarian, and have had at least initial medical care before you even bring them home.

Now if you are absolutely in love with Vizslas, or Russian Wolfhounds, or Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, and you don't find one in your local shelter, check out breed rescue groups, many of whom have these dogs in serious need of new homes. If you still can't find that Labradoodle you want for your family, by all means go to a responsible breeder, who can attest to the line she or he is breeding, introduce you to their breeding family, show you the actual environment and support you before, during, and after the purchase (much like a good shelter will do). Responsible breeders will know everything about their animals, house them as members of their own families (never in cages), and will want to know as much about you as you want to know about them. That's why good breeders will never sell to a puppy store.

Never, ever, buy a dog or cat from a source you can't verify. You may as well send a check directly to the puppy mill if you do that.

Now even if you're not in the market for a new pup, there are still many ways to support the effort to close down puppy mills. Share the truth about puppy mills with your friends, families, and coworkers. Boycott pet stores which sell puppies, and donate to those organizations fighting this good fight. There are still thousands of puppy mills in operation in this country. For more information, go to the HSUS's Stop Puppy Mills campaign website at [www.StopPuppyMills.org](http://www.StopPuppyMills.org). Hundreds of these operations have been closed down. But we need to be sure they're closed for good and new ones don't take their place. The best way of doing this is to know the truth behind those ads and the pain behind the fine print.



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