

Sunday Column – Puppy Mills
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Before you read any further I would like to make one thing perfectly clear. I count among my friends at least two reputable dog breeders and I don't have a problem with those who do this work legitimately. These breeders do it for love of the breed, not for money. Any profits are used for veterinary care and testing for genetic weaknesses to ensure those they breed will produce healthy puppies.

That said the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) estimates there are as many as 10,000 puppy mills in the U.S. Barely half of these are registered with state and/or federal governments. Those mills selling puppies on-line most easily evade detection; however, those who sell directly to individuals or pet stores are no better, whether they are licensed or not.

It is ironic that consumers often think they will get a better product from a breeder when many well-run rescue groups and shelters provide far healthier animals. Even a stray dog picked up off the street is better off in many animal shelters these days than dogs kept by breeders.

The stories taken from puppy mill busts are too awful to repeat in detail here. It is enough to know that large scale breeders place profit above humane care. Breeding stock is kept in wire crates, one stacked on top of the other. Many of these animals live this way for years, never seeing sunlight, chasing a ball or rolling in grass.

When purchasing a pure bred or "designer dog" it is important to ask questions and even to visit the property. Ask to see the parent dogs. Ask to contact their veterinarian for a reference. If they are evasive you may very well be dealing with a puppy mill. Purchasing from these operations may save that one puppy but it will condemn many more animals to a lifetime of suffering.

The USDA and state departments of agriculture try to monitor the puppy trade. Unfortunately, the numbers are stacked against them and there is no way they can keep up. It is really up to all of us as consumers to stop supporting puppy mills.

If you really want a purebred dog you can often get one at your local animal shelter. At PAWS Humane we keep a breed request binder and when your breed comes in we'll give you a call. Sometimes you will be better off with a mixed breed. Some purebreds have very strong character traits that make them difficult to live with. They may also have genetic weaknesses that will make them expensive to keep over the years. When breeds are mixed the result can be a dog that is healthier and easier to live with.

And if that doesn't convince you to adopt from a shelter then think of the lives you will be saving. You will not only save the pet you adopt but your adoption will free up cage space to save another.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.