

**PAWS for Action – 2015: A good year
To run 1/31/2016**

Maybe it's just me but it seems like public awareness regarding animal welfare issues is on the rise. And with increased awareness more good laws are being passed on behalf of animals at all levels of government.

What is even more remarkable is that more and more corporations are voluntarily making animal friendly choices in how they carry out their business. For instance, during 2015 more Pets Plus stores committed to the Puppy-Friendly Pet Stores model promoted by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), by featuring adoptable dogs instead of selling puppies.

Consumers are beginning to reject puppies which come through large scale breeding operations. Puppy mills are defined by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) as "large-scale commercial dog breeding operations where profit is given priority over the well-being of the dogs."

One such operation was raided in Needham, Alabama in early in 2015, where 141 dogs and puppies were seized. Dismantling a puppy mill tends to be cost prohibitive for local law enforcement acting alone. In this case, the ASPCA stepped up to foot the bill to house these dogs and provide medical care until all of them were adopted.

This past March, Montgomery County, Maryland, passed a ban on the retail sale of puppy mill dogs. Helping to solidify this action, federal courts upheld such bans in Rhode Island, Cook County and Phoenix.

Virginia became the third state in the nation to restrict where pet stores can acquire puppies and the fifth state to restrict unregulated outdoor sales of dogs and puppies. Laws like these help to drive the market toward responsible breeders and shelters and rescue groups.

Veterinary colleges and research facilities are finding alternatives to using live animals as subjects for terminal surgeries and for biomedical tests. During 2015, the largest remaining Class B dog dealer in the U.S. went out of business, leaving only two remaining dealers that sell dogs from random sources to research laboratories. This is down from hundreds of such dealers only two decades ago.

Alabama is famously unfriendly to low-cost spay neuter clinics. We tried unsuccessfully for four years running to pass legislation that would have allowed low-cost single purpose clinics to spay and neuter Alabama's companion animals in order to reduce high birthrates and euthanasia rates of puppies and kittens in our state. The opposition is composed of a small group of vocal and well-connected veterinarians and they have won the battle ... for now at least.

But there is always hope and many of you have read of plans to build a fund which would subsidize spay/neuter surgeries performed by participating veterinarians throughout Lee County. The subsidy will be available to households which qualify based on income level.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are approximately 55,864 households in Lee County with 22% living at the poverty level. This means some 22,000 households would qualify for the subsidy and that is a good start on the problem of pet overpopulation in Lee County.

Although it appears that the spay/neuter bill is dead in the water for the 2016 legislative session perhaps this development in Lee County will help to move us forward. If this is the best Alabama can do for now, we'll take it.

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