

Sunday Column – Retail puppies
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The ASPCA defines a puppy mill as a “large-scale commercial dog breeding facility where profit is given priority over the well-being of the dogs.” That means that humane care of the animals is not a priority. In fact this has been well-documented by the stories we hear from various animal welfare groups, including our local animal control agencies, who have had to bear the cost and heartache when they have to seize dogs from these operations.

Big box stores like Petco, PetSmart and Pet Supermarket stopped retailing puppy mill dogs many years ago. They yielded to public pressure, and possibly their own consciences, when they made the decision to change their business models. In my opinion these were acts of heroism as it eliminated a lucrative revenue stream.

These stores not only stopped selling puppy mill puppies, they offered a free venue for rescue groups to provide in-store adoptions. They also created foundations to provide grants for nonprofit and even municipal animal welfare organizations to reduce pet overpopulation and increase live release rates in shelters.

Unfortunately, there are some retail pet stores who continue to source their product from puppy mills. Large scale puppy producers also sell on-line and at flea markets. The only way this is going to stop is if it becomes unprofitable. That will happen when the public refuses to purchase puppies through these channels. Please don't think you are rescuing a puppy when you buy from a puppy mill. In reality, this supports a cruel industry and dooms the breeding stock to a horrible existence.

As a consumer you need to know that indiscriminate breeding produces puppies with poor temperaments and too often with crippling health issues. Low standards of care create environments in which disease runs rampant.

Responsible breeders sell directly to the consumer. Their animals are microchipped and they will have you sign a contract agreeing to return the dog if for any reason you decide later not to keep her.

Please consider adoption first. Dave and I now have three dogs. We got every one of them from a rescue organization and they are the best dogs ever!

However, if you simply love a particular breed, do the research to find a responsible breeder and visit the premises. Ask for a tour so you can see for yourself how they care for their animals. You should also ask for a reference from their veterinarian. If they aren't forthcoming you may very well be working with a puppy mill.

The Georgia legislature has been grappling with a house bill that would prohibit local governments from enacting ordinances that would restrict puppy sales in retail outlets. The bill didn't make it through "cross-over day" so the sponsors are attempting to attach it to another bill.

Legislators should know better! But consumers have the power to end puppy mills for good and maybe that is the best way to do this.

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