



THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES

## One Year Later: Some of Missouri's Worst Puppy Mills are Still Selling to Pet Stores and Online

November 2011

[November 10, 2011] Today The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) released the results of an investigation of more than 100 New York pet stores. The expose found that some of the worst puppy mills in Missouri, identified in The HSUS Missouri Dirty Dozen report, are still licensed and are still selling puppies to pet stores and online more than one year after the report became public.

Brandi Cheney, one of the operators that The HSUS's Dirty Dozen report linked to a facility with more than 500 pages of US Department of Agriculture violations and enforcement records, was found shipping at least 38 puppies to seven different pet stores in New York between March and June of 2011.

Researchers at The HSUS discovered at least five of the breeders identified in our 2010 Dirty Dozen report and/or our March 2011 update report selling to 15 different pet stores in the New York City area in the first half of 2011 alone, while a sixth (Tidwell) was also found shipping puppies to private individuals in New York, likely as a result of Internet sales.

The October 2010 Missouri's Dirty Dozen report and the related update released in March 2011 were a result of a study of hundreds of pages of state and federal inspection reports, investigators' photographs, and enforcement records, resulting in a list of some of the worst puppy mills in Missouri. The report included direct quotes detailing horrific dog care violations documented on the facilities' federal and/or state kennel inspection reports, including thin, short-haired dogs found shivering in the cold in temperatures as low as 9 degrees, dogs with open, oozing or bleeding sores, underweight dogs with their entire skeletal structures showing, and sick or dying puppies who had not been treated by a veterinarian.



***The face behind the pet store puppies.***

*A breeding dog at a facility operated by Brandi Cheney and Diana Stephenson was so severely matted that her face was barely visible. USDA/2008*

## ***By the numbers:***

- 3,000 = Number of puppies shipped from MO to NY pet stores in approximately one 4-month period in 2011 alone.
- 5 = Number of Missouri's Dirty Dozen -related operations found selling to New York pet stores.
- 15 = Number of different pet stores in NY alone purchasing from some of Missouri's worst breeders during one four-month period in 2011.
- 7 = Number of pet stores in New York found buying from Brandi Cheney / Circle B Farms alone.
- 4 out of 12 = Number of original "Dirty Dozen" kennels that are no longer USDA nor state licensed and appear to have shut down.
- 8 out of 12 = Number of original "Dirty Dozen" kennels that still hold a 2011 MO state kennel license and/or a federal (USDA) license, according to the most recent license lists available. (Brandi Cheney, who was co-licensee of the recently shuttered S & S Family Puppies, still operates a separate facility.)



*HSUS investigators photographed dogs exposed to the bitter cold at S & S Family Puppies in Milan, MO last year. Although the business was forced to shut down in May 2011, only one of its operators, Diana Stephenson, was held accountable. The other, Brandi Cheney, continues to operate a separate puppy mill that has been linked to a growing number of Animal Welfare Act violations in 2011. Photo credit: 2010/HSUS*

## ***Terrible three***

The following three dealers were found selling puppies to pet stores in New York this year after being identified in our 2010 and/or 2011 reports on Missouri's Dirty Dozen. All three dealers have continued to accumulate additional serious animal welfare violations in 2011, according to USDA and/or state inspection reports reviewed by The HSUS:

### **1. Brandi Cheney/ Circle B Farms, Huntsville:**

- **State (MDA) Violations.** Severe violations documented by the Missouri Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health in July 2011 included a heat index of 110.7 degrees inside one of the kennel buildings, with dogs "panting at a rapid/steady rate," a poodle with a swollen foot who could not bear weight on it, a cock-a-poo with hair so badly matted that it was pulling on her skin, and "additional adult dogs" who had been obtained by the kennel without any proof of rabies vaccination. According to MDA records, Cheney sent in her license application without the required fee, and was therefore operating for a time without meeting the requirements for a license.

- **Federal (USDA) violations** in 2011 included temperatures inside the kennel registering as high as 116 degrees F., failure to provide adequate lighting or electricity, and a failure to provide adequate cage space for some of the dogs.
- **Despite these problems, Cheney sold puppies to 7 different pet stores in New York** alone, including American Dog Club, Critter Comforts, Happy Tails, Pet Palace, Raising Rover & Baby, Tea Cup Pup, and Yipity Yap.

## 2. Donald Schrage/ Rabbit Ridge Kennel, Edina:

- **State (MDA) violations:** Violations documented by the Missouri Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health in 2011 included a Shih Tzu with mats, hair loss, and open wounds on his feet; an accumulation of hair, dirt and grime in the whelping building; two Bulldogs with hair loss, one of whom had flies crawling across the affected area, which had not been treated by a vet; and housing in disrepair causing unsafe enclosures.
- **Repeat federal (USDA) violations in 2011** for several dogs with untreated medical issues, including: a dog so badly matted that he could not walk normally -- areas of matted hair had pulled away from this dog's skin, leaving "large areas of red, irritated skin" that were "oozing green pus and had a crusty appearance"; a repeat violation for a severely underweight Maltese "with vertebrae, hips and leg bones easily seen and palpable"; injured and sick animals; filthy conditions; high ammonia levels; and dogs at risk of heat stress due to a lack of shade.
- **Despite these violations, Schrage sold at least 4 different shipments of puppies, totaling about 30 animals, to Pets Unlimited** in Sunnyside, NY earlier this year.

## 3. Ruth Zuspann/ Zuspann Kennel, Edina:

- **State (MDA) violations.** Violations documented by the Missouri Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health in May 2011 included lick waterers with jagged, metal edges; an accumulation of feces, rusty metal on stacked cages in the basement and a trailer; a Yorkie with a bluish, cloudy eye and matted hair around the face "in long strands" that Zuspann stated was a "permanent condition" for the dog; "a strong odor and high ammonia level," with the inspector noting, "it was hard for me to breathe and burned my nose," a "strong fermenting odor;" and two dogs with a broken waterer who, when provided with water at the request of the inspector, "drank until the bowl was empty."
- **USDA violations in 2011** for an attempted inspection (an inspector was not given access to during regular business hours), repeat non-compliances for a dog with thick green eye discharge, another with an untreated foot injury, repeat violations for a Yorkshire Terrier with an eye problem and several Yorkshire Terriers who were so badly matted that on one dog "matted hair was stuck to the eyeball, limiting the dogs eyesight" and causing the eye to weep; 17 apparently missing dogs unaccounted for in the records; repeat violations for strong ammonia odors that irritated the inspectors' noses, 11 dogs with excessively long toenails that prevented them from standing normally, and unsafe or too-small enclosures for some of the dogs.

- **Despite these animal welfare problems, Zuspann sold puppies to at least 4 different pet retailers in NY** in 2011, including American Kennels, CitiPups, Montana Pets, and Zoorama, Inc.

### ***Three Crackdowns***

At least three of the kennels mentioned in our previous reports have recently been shut down or lost their federal licenses, including:

#### **Marsha Cox/ Mar-Don Kennels**

- As reported by The HSUS in October 2011, the USDA permanently revoked the license of Marsha Cox / Mar-Don Kennels after repeated violations of the Animal Welfare Act. The kennel is now permanently barred from selling to pet stores or brokers. However, at press time Cox was still state licensed. The HSUS has encouraged the Missouri Department of Agriculture to investigate her state license status.

#### **Diana Stephenson/ S & S Family Puppies**

- As reported by The HSUS in May 2011, the Missouri Attorney General required Diana Stephenson of S & S Family Puppies to disperse her kennel and has prevented her from obtaining a breeding facility license for at least 8 years. Unfortunately, Stephenson's daughter and co-licensee of S & S Family Puppies (as indicated in USDA records), Brandi Cheney, continues to operate a substandard kennel in Missouri that is still licensed by both the USDA and MDA.

#### **John and Sharlette Tidwell**

- John and Sharlette Tidwell, who owned Ramblin Spring Kennel, dropped their USDA "class B" license in October 2010 after being cited for numerous problems by federal inspectors, including 2009 violations for performing invasive surgical procedures on their own animals without a veterinary license. They then obtained a USDA "T" transporters' license in March 2011 under the name of John Tidwell. However, according to USDA records the "T" license was cancelled within a month for unknown reasons. The Tidwells can no longer legally sell puppies to brokers or pet stores. However, The HSUS found them selling to several private owners in New York this year, presumably via their website, Tidwellfarm.com. Unfortunately, this type of sale is still legal as long as they maintain their Missouri state kennel license, which is still active.

### ***Still Accumulating Animal Welfare Act Violations***

Most of the following dealers identified as "new concerns" in our March update report continue to accumulate severe USDA violations. Although only one of them (Zuspann) was found selling to pet stores in New York, all of the dealers below are still USDA-licensed and may continue to sell to pet stores across the country, despite ongoing federal Animal Welfare Act violations:

- Lou Cox (related to Marsha Cox) – Lou's Country Kennel, Chillicothe
- Joseph and LeRoy Detweiler – Sunset Ridge Kennel, Princeton
- Rhonda Gear – Country Babies, Galt
- Ruth Zuspann – Zuspann Kennel, Edina
- Wilma Jinson – Jinson Kennel, Stella

## ***HSUS Recommendations***

As a result of this recent report, The Humane Society of the United States issues the following recommendations to the Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri's Office of the Attorney General, and the United States Department of Agriculture:

1. Permanently revoke the licenses of Brandi Cheney/ Circle B Farms; Donald Schrage/ Rabbit Ridge Kennel, and other operators that have been identified in the 2010 Dirty Dozen report and March 2011 Dirty Dozen report update whose facilities have demonstrated chronic, -repeated animal care violations in years past and repeatedly in 2011.
2. We applaud recent moves by the Missouri's Attorney General's office and the Missouri Department of Agriculture to close down S & S Family Puppies (Diana Stephenson) for at least 8 years, and moves by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to permanently revoke the license of Marsha Cox. This demonstrates progress in cracking down on some of the worst kennels in Missouri. However, both operations are linked to family members who continue to own and operate equally substandard facilities, and may even have received dogs from the closed facilities. To the extent that the Department of Agriculture is allowing substandard operations to simply rotate license holders despite the authorities discovering chronic animal care violations, the spirit of the law and the agencies' responsibilities under the law to protect animals from abuse are not being served.
3. The Humane Society of the United States strongly encourages the Missouri Department of Agriculture, the Missouri Office of the Attorney General, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to ensure that individuals whose licenses are revoked due to a lack of proper animal care are not given the opportunity to simply transfer the animals to commercial breeding operations that may be equally problematic. Nor should noncompliant facilities be given the opportunity to profit from the animals they have neglected to properly care for by selling them at auction or to other operators. Animals removed from substandard facilities should be spayed or neutered at the expense of the substandard operator, and placed with nonprofit animal sheltering organizations to be made available for adoption.