THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Fact Sheet on Puppy Mills and Flea Markets

Flea Markets are meccas for problematic puppy sellers. Since the USDA is now regulating commercial breeders who sell puppies sight-unseen over the Internet, flea markets are one of the last unregulated marketplaces for questionable puppy sellers, many of them unlicensed and uninspected. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of operators selling puppies at flea markets across the country—likely in an effort to escape government regulation.

Flea markets are not federally regulated because the USDA does not oversee puppy sellers who sell to consumers in face-to-face transactions, even if those transactions take place off the seller's or breeder's property.

Purchasing a puppy at a flea market makes it impossible to see the parents of the puppies or the conditions in which they were raised—making flea markets the perfect sales venues for dealers who have something to hide.

Several states, including Louisiana, Nevada and Oklahoma have laws that restrict the open-air sales of pet at flea markets, at swap meets, along roadsides, or at similar public venues.

Puppies who have been raised in poor conditions or have not received proper veterinary care often suffer from illnesses or parasites that are transmissible to humans, and diseases can spread rapidly at open-air venues like flea markets, where dozens of people a day may handle animals. Transmittable health problems include parvovirus and mange, which can be passed to other puppies or dogs, and giardia, which can be passed to both animals and humans. Additionally, there have been several documented cases of rabid puppies sold at flea markets throughout the country.