

## Internet Puppy Sellers: No Federal License Required

Currently large-scale, commercial dog breeders who sell puppies for resale to brokers or pet stores are required to be federally licensed and inspected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). But a gaping loophole in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) regulations has allowed commercial breeders who sell puppies online, by mail or over the phone to evade oversight. Such facilities, even those with hundreds of dogs, are not inspected by the USDA and can sell thousands of puppies a year to consumers. A new rule proposed by the USDA would close the loophole in the Animal Welfare Act regulations that has allowed many abusive puppy mills to flourish for decades sight-unseen.



The dog pictured above was one of 124 dogs seized by the Pearl River County Sheriff's Department in Carriere, MS with the assistance of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) in July 2010. Many of the rescued dogs were suffering from severe malnourishment, painful infections, parasites and infectious diseases. The animals were being housed in cramped, unsanitary conditions without proper medical care. Two dead animals were also removed from the property. The breeders were not required to have a USDA license since they had been selling puppies to consumers online and via classified ads.



In February 2009, The HSUS assisted Wayne County Animal Control with the rescue of 283 dogs from Thornton's Kennels near Goldsboro, NC. Many of the dogs, including the one pictured on the left, were emaciated, had untreated lacerations, severely matted fur and serious skin and eye infections. They were being housed in small cages in cold, unventilated barns. The breeder was selling puppies over the Internet and through classified advertisements, and therefore was not required to have a USDA license. After operating for decades, the breeder was convicted of twelve counts of animal cruelty. Had she been required to have a USDA license and regular inspections, these

horrendous abuses likely could have ended much sooner or could have been avoided altogether.

In August 2008, The HSUS assisted in rescuing nearly 1,000 dogs from a puppy mill in Parkersburg, W.V. The puppies were being sold online on a beautiful website that featured clean and healthy-looking puppies. The reality was much different as seen in the photo below. Many of the dogs found at the facility were filthy, severely underweight, unsocialized and housed in dirty and cramped cages.

**The proposed change to the AWA regulations would require the following:**

- Large-scale breeders who sell puppies over the Internet or by phone or mail order will now be required to be federally licensed and inspected just like breeders who sell to pet stores.
- The rule will not affect home breeders who sell puppies from their own properties and allow prospective buyers to personally observe the animals on site.
- Small breeders with just a handful of female breeding dogs will continue to be exempt from coverage.

