



Secrets & Lies: The Year In Review

The symbiotic relationship between puppy mills and pet stores is still hard to prove to the satisfaction of anyone who doesn't want to believe. Many people who are finally acknowledging that puppy mills are "bad places" and should not be supported nevertheless still refuse to accept that mills and pet stores are opposite sides of the same coin. Today, neither business could survive without the other so they purposefully conspire to falsely present a wholesome image to pet shoppers. And like gullible children, a large segment of the public continues to believe in this carefully orchestrated fairy tale.

Since WWII, the population has been systematically 'trained' to obtain their pets from impersonal commercial sources where puppies are sold in volume, rather than by going to the home or kennel of a local breeder to pick out a puppy. But in going to pick out a locally raised puppy, a buyer is able to see with his own eyes where the dogs are being raised, the conditions they are living under, and the kind of people who are doing the breeding. If he asks, he can probably get local references so that he can talk with a breeder's other puppy buyers. And he would certainly have his breeder's phone number and a real person's face to go with it in case he had any health or behavioral questions as his puppy matured.

Under the commercial system, puppies come from a local pet store which may offer the same 'neighbor-

hood-ey' feeling but without any of the other advantages that come with buying directly from a local breeder.

Once several layers of buffer had been set in place between the breeders and their end-consumers, any obligation for accountability to buyers flew right out the window. The inner workings of this new style of puppy business stayed shrouded in secrecy for many years. For one thing, pet store puppy buyers didn't know enough initially to ask the right questions. They probably assumed that the neighborhood pet store was pretty much equivalent to the neighborhood breeder. Once the true horrors of commercial puppy milling came out into the open and customers began asking questions, active industry-wide lying began to replace the passive secrecy which had enabled the puppy mill/pet store partnership to prosper for decades.

Sadly, we as consumers in this country have become overly confident that we are being told "the truth" about everything we buy. We expect truth in lending and truth in advertising. We take for granted what the labels tell us about the ingredients in our foods and the miles per gallon we're entitled to expect from a new car. It doesn't even occur to us to wonder whether somebody was lying when they stamped the country of origin on our olive oil or our coffee or the leather soles of our new shoes. Even the rawhide chew toys we buy our dogs merit honest labeling, while the dogs themselves still do not?

When did industry-wide, calculated lying to consumers become an acceptable business practice for *any* billion dollar industry in this country?

NPM'S Research Service

The number of puppies wholesaled in the US annually has always been a mystery. USDA inspection reports reflect that mills sell 4,000 puppies to stores each week, or 208,000 per year. We know the average price tag is \$800, or a whopping *3.2 million dollars per week* coming in at the retail level. These are the only statistics I'm aware of on the wholesale/retail business of dogs.

About a year ago I began offering a free research service to people who wanted to know where their pet store puppies actually came from. I documented data from each owner about the pet store, breeder, broker, and their puppy's health and veterinary costs. In return, I provided them with the breeder's USDA Inspection Reports, AKC violation history, any charges under the Animal Welfare Act, the pet store's Better Business Bureau report and any site complaints that had been lodged against it.

The reports are often disturbing to me, and most certainly have been a shock to many a puppy buyer who had spent \$1000 on a puppy they were told was going to be a healthy, long-lived companion because it had been bred by a good "private breeder". The facts and

figures discussed here were gathered from these owner inquiries. I have now completed 800 reports but this column is based on the 700 puppies whose data has been analyzed so far. Seventy-seven different breeds are represented.

Hot Breeds

Surprisingly, the Italian Greyhound ranks quite high on the list of 77 breeds that pet shop buyers have inquired about so far. The ten most frequently represented breeds have been:

1. Yorkshire Terrier
2. Labrador Retriever
3. Shih Tzu
4. Miniature Dachshund
5. Italian Greyhound
6. West Highland White Terrier
7. Poos (Poodle mix)
8. Jack Russell Terrier
9. Chihuahua
10. Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier

Hot Spots

These 700 puppies had been sold from pet stores scattered all over the US, including Alaska and Hawaii. In all, forty-four different states were represented. However, 55% of these pet stores were located in only seven states. Over half of all the puppies were sold out of stores in one of the following states:

New York.....	12%
Florida.....	11%
New Jersey	8%
Illinois.....	6%
Pennsylvania	6%
California.....	5%
Ohio	5%

The MO-KAN Monopoly

While pet stores want the buying public to believe that they only obtain their puppy stock from local

breeders, the stores in this study had bought 57% of their puppies from brokers in Missouri. Running a poor second to Missouri was the state of Kansas, whose brokers had supplied 19% of the puppies. This means that while 44 states were represented in the sales, brokers in just *two* of those states were responsible for furnishing a hefty 76% of the total number of pups to the stores in question.

Where They Were Born

The locations of the breeders who whelped these puppies followed the same pattern, which is not surprising when we stop and remember how mill puppies are collected when it is time for their five day visit to a broker facility. The brokers had gathered up their puppies from breeders in the following states:

Missouri	40%
Kansas	12%
Iowa	11%
Arkansas	5%
Nebraska	5%
Pennsylvania	4%
Other states	1%

Those readers who like statistics to make sense have probably noticed there is something wrong here. They are right, something is very wrong but not with the math. The missing 22% of the puppies came from what can only be classified as "unknown areas". It is not unreasonable to assume that 3/4 of this 22% also probably came from, if not actually inside Missouri or Kansas, at least from within one day's drive of one of those two states since a broker's collection area is limited to the miles that can be covered by a two day, round trip road trip. But what it means for our purposes is the most disturbing revelation - 22% of the pet store customers in this study have absolutely no clue whatsoever where their puppies came from!

Health

The health reports revealed

that a full 50% of the 700 puppies purchased suffered from health problems to some degree. Their conditions ranged from treatable external parasites (such as fleas, ticks, lice, or mange) to life-threatening afflictions which required hospitalization and in some cases resulted in death or in necessary euthanasia. The following problems were reported over and over:

Internal parasites	18%
External parasites	4%
Kennel cough	20%
Critical illnesses	8%

While hereditary ailments such as seizure disorders, liver shunts and PRA were not reported in these puppies, it is important to point out that the overwhelming majority of dogs in the sample were still quite young, between one and two years old. Most adult onset hereditary ailments would not be expected to present symptoms at this age.

The Registries

It was explained in a previous column how the mill industry had watched Christmas sales closely in order to assess whether consumers did, in fact, care if the puppies they were buying were AKC registered or not. It determined that most did not, and this was borne out again here. Those buyers who had bought a puppy without receiving any sort of registration papers from the pet store combined with those who got papers but had no idea what they meant amounted to 50% of the 700 owners.

For those pups whose registry was known or could be determined, the registries could be broken down as follows:

AKC	50%
APRI	20%
ACA	10%
Misc. other	20%

Again, going by their ages,

most were registered before the mass exodus from AKC had reached full speed during 2002 and 2003.

The Italian Greyhounds

Turning now to the twenty-two IG puppies, their average purchase price was \$566. This is \$234 less than the all-breed average of \$800. However, this is not an indication that the original price of these IGs was lower than that of the other breeds. It is more likely a reflection of their ages at the time they were purchased. The average age at the time of sale was fourteen weeks. Only two puppies were nine weeks old and several had reached four to six months before anyone bought them! This seems to be a breed that is discounted heavily as the pups begin to outgrow the pet store cages.

Nine of the twenty-two pup-

pies were either unregistered (no papers when purchased) or from undeterminable registries (did have papers but they could not be located). Five were AKC, five were APRI, and two were ACA.

The breeders of the IG puppies were based in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma. Only ONE puppy came from a "local breeder". That puppy was purchased out of a feed store in Nebraska.

In a separate study earlier, I had analyzed over 30,000 USDA records with the goal of finding certain kennel statistics across the country. Among other things, I was able to determine that the average USDA licensed mill operation in the US has 60 breeding dogs. In contrast, the twenty-two IGs researched from the NoPuppyMills reports were bred in

mills whose average kennel size was 141 breeding dogs. This would seem to suggest that IGs are being bred by the large scale breeders along with a significant number of other breeds. So much for the "small private breeder" pitch so popular with pet store clerks!

Coming Up

A year has now passed since I began writing this column for the IG Times. Your e-mails and feedback have been great. It is a real pleasure to present IG-specific mill topics to readers who really do want the information.

Coming up in the Spring issue we will be covering the Italian Greyhound's situation in Missouri, "The Puppy Mill Capital of the World". As we look at newspaper ads, shelters, dog auctions, and industry news, you will be meeting a very different breed of IG than most readers expect. 🐾



The Italian Greyhound Cemetery at San Souci. The final resting place for Frederick the Great of Prussia.



Frederick The Great

San Souci Palace



Although Frederick the Great asked to be buried with his Italian Greyhounds, that final wish went unanswered for years before his gravesite was moved to his San Souci Palace. The San Souci gravesite is marked by a headstone in the same design as that of his beloved dogs.