



Puppy Mills— the Devastating Consequences

By Victoria Stilwell, Dog Trainer /Host of Animal Planet's *It's Me or the Dog*

People have an ethical responsibility to raise and treat animals with care and respect. The evidence is overwhelming – puppy farming is cruel and potentially very dangerous for everyone whether they own a dog or not. **It is time for the legislators to sit up and take note because the practice of puppy milling has an impact on us all.** These are the facts:



Puppy mills breed for bulk and profit with no concern for health or temperament. Many puppies that are sold from these places have severe health conditions. The puppies that don't die within a few weeks of purchase (and yes, there are many that do) can experience health problems for the rest of their lives. I have met many families that have lost their puppies shortly after buying them from puppy mills, which causes much distress, particularly for younger members of the family. The cost to other families whose puppies don't die but continue to have health problems into adulthood can be financially draining, and many of these dogs end up either being euthanized or dumped into the shelter system. There are also many documented cases of puppies being sold with serious diseases that can be transmitted to humans. Children are at particular risk if they come in contact with such dogs.



Puppy mill puppies are kept in appalling conditions with little contact or experience of other dogs, people or environments in the vital weeks when mental and physical development is so crucial.

- Many puppies are sold too young (4 to 7 weeks old) to maximize profits. It is vital that puppies are with their mothers and their litter mates until at least 8 weeks old. Puppies learn a lot about social interaction from their littermates and valuable life lessons from their mothers. However many puppy mill mothers who are used as breeding machines and kept in small cages or boxes all their lives, are so sick and mentally depressed, they are unable to give the guidance that their puppies need. Many puppies that come from puppy mills are emotionally numb and don't know how to play with toys, other dogs or humans.
- From the moment they are born, puppies need to have lots of social interaction and handling by humans in order for them to build that important human/animal bond. If this is not done from birth a pup will be uncomfortable with human interaction. A dog like this will be nervous, anxious and have a greater risk of responding aggressively towards a human.
- Potential dog owners will buy such puppies from the puppy farmers themselves, pet stores, (where do you think the vast number of puppies sold in pet stores on main street or in shopping malls come from?) yard sales, flea markets and ads in local papers without realizing the negative consequences that such an upbringing can create. Behavioral science has proven that the most valuable time for a puppy to learn from its environment is from birth to 16 weeks. A puppy is like a sponge at that time and if it hasn't had positive experiences in all different kinds of environments before 16 weeks of age, it can develop severe social difficulties such as aggression, destructive behavior, anxiety and nervousness towards people and/or other dogs. This negative behavior can be difficult to change even

with training and behavior modification therapy. Owners that buy dogs from sources where they are unable to see what the breeding environment is like and where there is no opportunity to meet the mother are buying a potential liability. A lot of information can be gained just by watching a mother dog interacting with her puppies, and a breeder will know of any potential genetic abnormalities that might affect their puppy's mental and physical development. If it is a responsible breeder, there should be none.

❤️ **National Humane Organizations estimate that an average of 4 to 5 million dogs are put down every year and only 5% of those for medical reasons.** Why? Because there are too many dogs and too few homes to care for them. The last thing this country needs is puppy mills that breed thousands upon thousands of dogs a year to add to the pet overpopulation problem that exists in the United States. The more they breed and the more the unsuspecting public buys, the more dogs will end up in shelters or worse and be killed because there are no homes for them.

❤️ **Owning a dog or any other pet allows a child the opportunity to learn how to care for and respect that pet.** It is a known fact that children who are taught to respect animals from an early age are the most likely to translate that compassion onto humans. What sort of message does the abusive practice of puppy farming send to our children?

Legislators have a responsibility to provide laws for the common good. The only way this horrendous situation will change is with education and effective legislation. It is the government's responsibility to keep the people they serve safe, but if more and more of these puppy mills are allowed to operate, the implications will have a negative impact on us all. This is a reality. I see the devastating consequences of puppy mill farming in my job as a trainer. It is very stressful for owners when they realize that their dream dog is sick and/or aggressive because of where they were purchased. The problem needs to be tackled at source and the despicable practice of puppy farming must become a thing of the past. Action needs to be taken now to keep dogs, dog owners and the non dog-owning public safe.

Note: We encourage you to share this article with your state legislators. In Wisconsin, you can find your area's representatives and their contact information on the WI State website: www.legis.state.wi.us . Click on "Who Represents Me" in the middle of the page. You may also call, toll free, 1-800-362-WISC.

Outside of WI, please see the ASPCA's website at www.asPCA.org , click on the "Lobbying for Animals" link, then on the "Find Your Legislator" link (center column in red).



Victoria Stilwell is one of the world's most recognized and respected dog trainers. As the host of the hit TV show "It's Me or the Dog" (currently airing on Animal Planet in the US as well as 20 countries worldwide), Victoria has been able to share her insight and passion for positive, reward-based dog training with an ever-broadening audience. She has also authored two books on the subject. We are delighted that Victoria took time out of her busy schedule to write this article for Wisconsin Puppy Mill Project! To learn more about Victoria, please see her website at: www.victoriastilwell.com