

Dogs live a bleak existence at USDA-licensed puppy mills that sell to pet stores

An undercover investigation by the Humane Society of the United States

An HSUS undercover investigator visited dozens of dog breeders licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Arkansas, Kansas and Missouri in July 2020, filming at a distance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What the investigator found was disturbing: breeders licensed and considered in good standing to sell to pet stores, who were nevertheless keeping dozens or even hundreds of dogs in conditions that are a far cry from the happy and comfortable settings pet stores typically claim their puppies come from.

Despite the visibly barren conditions in which their dogs were kept, none of the puppy mills we visited had been cited recently by USDA inspectors for “direct” or “critical” violations, some of the more serious citations the USDA can apply. Except for a few issues like minor cleaning violations, most of these



USDA-licensed breeder Margaret Manning in Arkansas sold to Southpaw Pets, a Missouri broker that distributes puppies to pet stores all over the country. The USDA has not cited Manning for any recent housing or animal care violations. /The HSUS, 2020



USDA-licensed breeder Lewis Bloom in Kansas sold to pet stores in at least five different states, including at least one Petland store in MO. /The HSUS, 2020

breeders had not been cited for any recent violations whatsoever. At licensed and legal puppy mills like these, hundreds of breeding dogs languish for their entire lives in dismal operations. These breeders' mostly spotless official records give the public a false impression that all is well in America's puppy-producing heartland.

According to shipping records, at least two breeders the HSUS examined sold to three Petland stores in 2020—a Petland store in Florida, one in Kansas, and one in Missouri. Petland claims to buy only from breeders with no “critical” or “direct” USDA violations, but since the USDA has virtually stopped issuing citations in recent years, almost any USDA breeder can claim this distinction.

Twenty New York pet stores purchased puppies from at least eight of the breeders the investigator visited. At least eighteen Florida pet stores also bought from some of the breeders. Some of the breeders also sold to pet stores in



USDA-licensed breeder Sarah Webb in Missouri sold to JAKS Puppies, a massive dog broker in Iowa that provides puppies to pet stores in many states. /The HSUS, 2020

Connecticut, Illinois and New Jersey, among other states, or to massive middleman brokers that redistribute the dogs to pet stores across the country. In the case of breeder sales to brokers, it is more difficult to trace puppies to specific stores because shipment records typically do not contain breeder names. Altogether, we linked the breeders to more than 50 different pet stores across the country.

HSUS researchers who study USDA inspection reports have documented an alarming decline in agency enforcement actions and citations over the past few years. In 2016, the USDA cited pet breeders for 2,451 violations; in 2019 that number had plummeted to just 896 violations, a drop of [more than 60%](#). The HSUS believes this decline in citations results from lack of enforcement, not improved conditions. As documented in our annual [Horrible Hundred report](#) on problem puppy mills, some of the breeders whom USDA cited for no recent violations, such as Valente Rios in Missouri, were found with numerous serious animal care violations on their state inspection reports during the same time period that the USDA inspectors did not document any issues. And some of the breeders that USDA cited for relatively minor and infrequent violations received so many state citations or warnings that they were sued and closed down by the state, such as Debra Ritter's [Cornerstone Farms](#), which appeared in five of the HSUS's Horrible Hundred reports and was finally [shut down](#) by Missouri's Attorney General earlier this year.

But the fact remains that even breeders who do comply with USDA regulations may still keep dogs in conditions that most pet owners would find inhumane. Keeping breeding dogs in small, stacked cages for their entire lives is legal and acceptable under the outdated Animal Welfare Act regulations. The HSUS has been pressing the agency to update those regulations for many years. A decade's worth of analysis of the regulations and their application makes clear the inherent weakness of standards, which, even were they strongly enforced, would not provide puppy mill dogs with what most Americans would consider a good quality of life.

Pet stores routinely assure consumers that their puppies are healthy and come from reputable breeders, when in fact they often come from dismal mass-breeding facilities like the ones reviewed in this investigation. As the weather grows colder, dogs like these will be forced to live in squalor, discomfort and misery, without a bed, a treat, a toy or the comforting touch of a caregiver.

The HSUS encourages families to first consider adoption from a shelter or rescue group as their primary option when seeking a pet. Those who decide to purchase a dog should make sure to purchase only from a [responsible breeder](#) who will meet them in person and who will show them where their puppy was born and raised.

Selected breeder and pet store links

Each of the breeders we visited is licensed to sell to pet stores, or online, all over the country. The following is a selection of some of the breeders we visited and some of the pet stores to which they supplied puppies. It is not intended to be a complete or comprehensive list.

Bernita Berntsen, La Harpe, KS

- USDA #48-A-0907
- No recent USDA violations. February 2020 dog count: 111 dogs and 41 puppies.
 - Sold to Pinnacle Pets, a massive MO pet store broker, in 8/2020, 9/2020, 10/2020

James Bixenman, Circle B Farms, New Cambria, MO

- USDA #43-A-4396
- No recent USDA violations. April 2019 dog count: 117 dogs and 46 puppies.
 - Sold to Astoria Pets, NY in 1/2020, 3/2020, 4/2020, 5/2020, 7/2020
 - Sold to NYC Breeder (name of pet store), NY in 3/2020
 - Sold to OMG Enterprises aka Bowwow Babies, NY in 1/2020, 2/2020, 3/2020, 7/2020, 8/2020, 9/2020
 - Sold to The Left Paw, NY in 2/2020, 6/2020, 7/2020
 - Sold to Vanity Pups, NY in 6/2020, 9/2020
 - Sold to Westchester Puppies, NY in 2/2020, 3/2020, 4/2020, 8/2020, 9/2020
 - Sold to Zoo-Rama Pets, NY in 1/2020, 7/2020
 - Sold to Puppy Paradise, NY in 8/2020, 9/2020
 - Sold to Teacup Pup Corp, NY in 9/2020
 - Sold to Pup Slope, NY in 9/2020
 - Sold to Worldwide Puppies, NY in 5/2019
 - Sold to Heavenly Puppies, FL in 9/2020
 - Sold to King of Pet Grooming, FL in 9/2020
 - Sold to Palm Beach Puppies, FL in 8/2020, 9/2020



- Sold to Breeders Pick Orlando, FL in 3/2020, 4/2020, 8/2020
- Sold to Imperial Puppies, FL in 8/2020
- Sold to Epic Puppies, FL in 8/2020
- Sold to Royalty Puppies, FL in 2/2020, 8/2020, 9/2020
- Sold to Nesy's Puppies, FL in 8/2020, 9/2020
- Sold to Glamorous Puppies, FL in 8/2020, 9/2020



Records reviewed by HSUS researchers show James Bixenman's Circle B Farms sold to at least 11 pet stores in New York and at least 15 stores in Florida, as well as pet stores in many other states. /The HSUS, 2020

- Sold to Quality Doggies, FL in 8/2020
- Sold to Roberto's Pet Shop, FL in 9/2020
- Sold to Waggs to Riches, FL in 8/2020
- Sold to Puppies Secret, FL in 4/2020
- Sold to Luxury Puppies, FL in 4/2019
- Sold to Puppies Plus, FL in 3/2019
- Sold to Furrylicious, NJ in 7/2020, 8/2020, 9/2020
- Sold to Puppy Palace, NJ in 7/2020, 8/2020
- Sold to Sue's Pets, UT in 9/2020
- Sold to Family Pet & Aquarium, NH in 8/2020, 9/2020
- Sold to Perfect Pup Inc, IL in 8/2020
- Sold to The Perfect Puppy, MA in 8/2020

Lewis Bloom, Bloom's Kennels, Clay Center, KS

- USDA #48-A-1316
- USDA violations: "Attempted inspection" violation, 2017; accumulation of feces violation and dirty conditions, 2017; No direct or critical violations. Feb 2020 dog count: 55 dogs and 41 puppies.
 - Sold to **Petland** Independence, MO in 10/2020
 - Sold to Pet City Baja in Colorado Springs, CO in 11/2019
 - Sold to Pet Kingdom, Fort Myers, FL in 4/2019
 - Sold to Pet Kingdom, Fort Myers, FL in 1/2019



- Sold to Breeders Pick, Orlando, FL in 1/2019
- Sold to Forever Love Puppies, Pembroke Pines, FL in 1/2019
- Sold to Quality Doggies, Miami, FL in 1/2019
- Sold to Central Park Puppies, NY in 7/2019
- Sold to Pets Unlimited, NY in 11/2019, 9/2019
- Sold to Northern Aquarium Pets, NY in 6/2018 and 8/2019
- Sold to Teacup Pup Corp, NY in 8/2019
- Sold to Puppy Paws, NY in 6/2018
- Sold to Bob's Tropical Pet Center, NY in 5/2018
- Sold to Gentle Jungle, CT in 8/2020, 10/2020

Lloyd Buck, Marshfield, MO

- USDA #43-A-2213
- No recent USDA violations. May 2019 dog count: 62 dogs and 20 puppies.
 - Sold to Puppy Boutique, Brooklyn, NY in 9/2019, 8/2019, 1/2020
 - Sold to NYC Breeders (pet store), Brooklyn NY in 7/2020
 - Sold to NY Breeder (name of pet store), White Plains NY in 7/2020



Terry Cozart in Missouri sold to pet stores in at least three different states, **including two Petland stores**. Despite rudimentary conditions, the breeder has not been cited for any recent USDA violations. /The HSUS, 2020

Terry Cozart, Neelyville, MO

- USDA #43-B-3600



- No recent USDA violations.
 - Sold to **Petland** Bradenton, FL in 4/2020
 - Sold to **Petland** Wichita, KS in 8/2020
 - Sold to Westland Dog Food, MI in 8/2020



Debra Deters/ Double D Blacktop Kennel in Kansas sold to Southpaw Pets, a middleman broker in Missouri that supplies puppies to many different pet stores. /The HSUS, 2020

Debra Deters, Double D Blacktop Kennel, Centralia, KS

- Former USDA #48-A-1058 (cancelled May 2017); current USDA # 48-A-2217
- Appeared in HSUS's **Horrible Hundred** report in 2016.
- No recent USDA violations on new license; old license has history of violations including vet care issues between 2015 and 2016. November 2019 dog count: 106 dogs and 75 puppies
 - Sold to Southpaw Pets (pet store broker), MO in 8/2020

Teresa (Theresa) Fox, Macomb, MO

- USDA #43-A-5882
- No recent USDA violations.
 - Sold to Citi Pups, NY in 10/2019, 5/2020

Karen Hoover (and Ira Hoover), Hurdland, MO

- USDA #43-A-5969
- No recent USDA violations.
 - Sold to OMG Enterprises aka Bowwow Babies, NY in 9/2020
 - Sold to Forever Love Puppies, FL in 7/2020
 - Sold to Puppies of Westport, CT in 9/2020



Lela Hughs, Trenton, MO

- USDA #43-A-4020
- No recent USDA violations.
 - Sold to Select Puppies (pet store broker), IA in 9/2020

Karen and Larry Jones, LVS Kennel, Wheeling, MO

- Old USDA #43-A-4516 (cancelled Jun 2011); Current USDA #43-A-5726
- No recent USDA violations.
 - Sold to Forever Love Puppies, FL in 9/2020

Margaret Manning, Pocahontas, AR

- USDA #71-A-0865
- USDA violations: “Attempted inspection” violation, 2017.
 - Sold to Southpaw Pets, MO (pet store broker) in 9/2020



A facility licensed to Karen Hoover in Hurdland, Missouri, has no recent USDA violations on its record, yet dogs at the operation appeared to live in barren conditions and had no room to run. Hoover sold to pet stores in Florida, New York and Connecticut. /The HSUS, 2020

Rae Lynn Mercer, Rambling Kennels, Hartville, MO

- USDA #43-A-3264
- USDA violations: “Attempted inspection” violation, 2019. February 2020 dog count: 106 dogs and 48 puppies
 - Sold to Citi Pups, NY in 6/2018



Beverly Sue and David Reid, Lebanon, MO

- USDA #43-B-3711
- No recent USDA violations. March 2020 dog count: 74 dogs and 29 puppies.
 - Sold to Westchester Puppies, NY in 11/2019, 3/2020, 4/2020
 - Sold to Furry Babies, IL in 9/2020



Despite having been cited by Missouri state officials for multiple animal care violations, as documented in the HSUS's Horrible Hundred reports, Valente Rios in Missouri was not cited for any recent violations by the USDA during the same period of time. /The HSUS, 2020

Valente Rios, Galt, MO

- USDA #43-A-5652
- Appeared in **HSUS's Horrible Hundred reports: 2013, 2014 and 2020 (recent state violations)**
- No recent USDA violations. March 2019 dog count: 281 dogs and 143 puppies.
 - Sold to Astoria Pets, NY in 1/2020
 - Sold to NY Breeder (name of pet store), White Plains NY in 3/2019
 - Sold to NYC Breeders (pet store), Brooklyn, NY in 3/2019, 9/2019
 - Sold to Westchester Puppies, NY in 12/2019, 9/2019, 6/2019
 - Sold to The Left Paw, NY in 10/2019
 - Sold to Vanity Pups Boutique, NY in 10/2019
 - Sold to Bob's Tropical Pet Center, NY in 7/2018
 - Sold to Hey Pets Inc, NY in 7/2019



Sarah Webb (S&C Precious Puppies), Gilman City, MO

- USDA #43-A-3961
- One “attempted inspection” violation, March 2019. June 2019 dog count: 44 dogs and 19 puppies.
 - Sold to JAKS Puppies, IA (large pet store broker) in 8/2020



Sarah Webb, S&C Precious Puppies of Gilman City, Missouri, sold to a massive Iowa broker, JAKS Puppies, in 2020. JAKS in turn ships puppies to pet stores all over the country. The USDA has not cited Webb for any recent violations, despite the rudimentary conditions shown in this photo. /The HSUS, 2020

For more information visit humanesociety.org/puppermills

