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New Fairfield, CT

October 16, 2013

"Ways to Improve the Puppy Industry and Ensure Healthy Animals in CT."

Language matters. The title of tonight's meeting –though sad- is accurate. Across the US, breeding puppies is an industry. We often hear from dog stores that they "get their dogs from reputable breeders." Technically, they are not lying. What *you* think is a *breeder*, and what they term as *breeder* are not the same. Let me illustrate my point with a brief story.

Recently my neighbor went to the Danbury Mall and bought a dog for son. She asked the salesperson where the dog came from, and the salesperson swore that the dog came from a licensed breeder and guaranteed that it was healthy. She brought the dog home, and of course it promptly got sick. Upon bringing it to the vet, she told him that the dog was not from a puppy mill, "Well, they gave me papers with the dog, so I know it's not from a puppy mill." The vet smirked and said, "Let me see the papers." He took them and pointed to the name at the bottom. He said, "See here, where it says Hunte, that's the biggest puppy mill in the country. Not only that, you have no idea who or what the parents were of this dog, so those papers are worth nothing." So, in addition to having a dog with pneumonia and other costly ailments, she had no idea that she was lied to, and that her thousand dollars went to support animal cruelty.

I'll use the Hunte Corporation as an example of just one of the many "puppy brokers" in the U.S. If you do just a cursory search for the Hunte Corporation, you will find a wealth of disturbing information. Remember, this is just one of many puppy brokers.

It is a block-long, 200,000 square foot facility, and it's the largest commercial puppy broker in Missouri. According to a November 2007 article in the Tulsa World, the company buys and sells over 90,000 puppies each year. They mass-produce so many dogs, they even sell dogs to Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico, Spain, and Japan, as if these countries need more unwanted dogs.

How do puppy stores get away with saying that they get their dogs from breeders? Straight from its website:

Hunte and brokers like them purchase the dogs from "breeders licensed by the US Department of Agriculture the others that are termed as 'hobby breeders'" also known as backyard breeders. Hunte claims on their website that they adhere to the "strictest puppy care standards, including guidelines established by the USDA, the State of Missouri and the American Kennel Club."

Here's the problem, upon further investigation, the AKC has no health standards for breeding other than a minimum age of 8 months. Registration indicates only that the dog's parents were registered as a recognized breed. It makes no claims on health, show quality or how a puppy was raised. That is how Hunte and hundreds of other puppy brokers get around laws. There are none. The company even received an "F" rating from the Southwest Missouri Better Business Bureau for failing to address customer complaints.

Furthermore, the USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service/Animal Care is responsible for inspections, reporting and enforcing the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The AWA is the only federal law that regulates animals bred and sold by dealers, animals in entertainment, zoo animals and laboratory animals. Even minimal requirements under the AWA are rarely enforced. There are only about a hundred USDA inspectors to monitor 10,000 facilities across the country. Additionally, "standards" are abysmal. Federal guidelines allow a medium sized terrier to be kept in a cage the size of a clothes drier for its entire life. For example, the act does not say you cannot have 300 dogs confined to cages for their entire lives, constantly bred, never to be taken for a walk or receive any personal attention. A breeder passes USDA muster as long as the dog has food, water and enough space to turn around. These dogs stay in that cage for its entire life, literally being bred to death. These backyard breeders that Hunte and other brokers get their dogs from are completely unregulated and unchecked.

How does this happen? Hunte has received at least 2 Rural Development Business and Industry Loans from the USDA totaling 3.5 million dollars in the past 8 years. So the same agency that is charged with inspecting kennels and brokers is the same agency that underwrote 3.5 million dollars in loans to a business it inspects. How is this not a conflict of interest?

The size of this puppy mill industry? According to Hunte, sales for 2001 exceeded 26 million, up from one million a decade earlier. Keep in mind this is only one broker-there are hundreds of these 'companies' and thousands of breeders.

When the Missouri Department of Natural Resources made a complaint-driven investigation of a Hunte kennel facility in 2003, they discovered "trenches of dead canines" on the premises.

What is most disturbing is that this continues today, as we sit here. *Think about this-if your neighbor had cages upon cages in his backyard, and you saw the same dogs in them year after year, standing on wire, not even able to turn around, in their own feces, having multiple births, breeding them to death, would you call animal control? Of course you would. Hunte and hundreds of other brokers are doing this on a massive scale, so why do we accept that? Why is it inhumane next-door, but perfectly acceptable on a large scale, because it's not in our face? Because we can look away?*

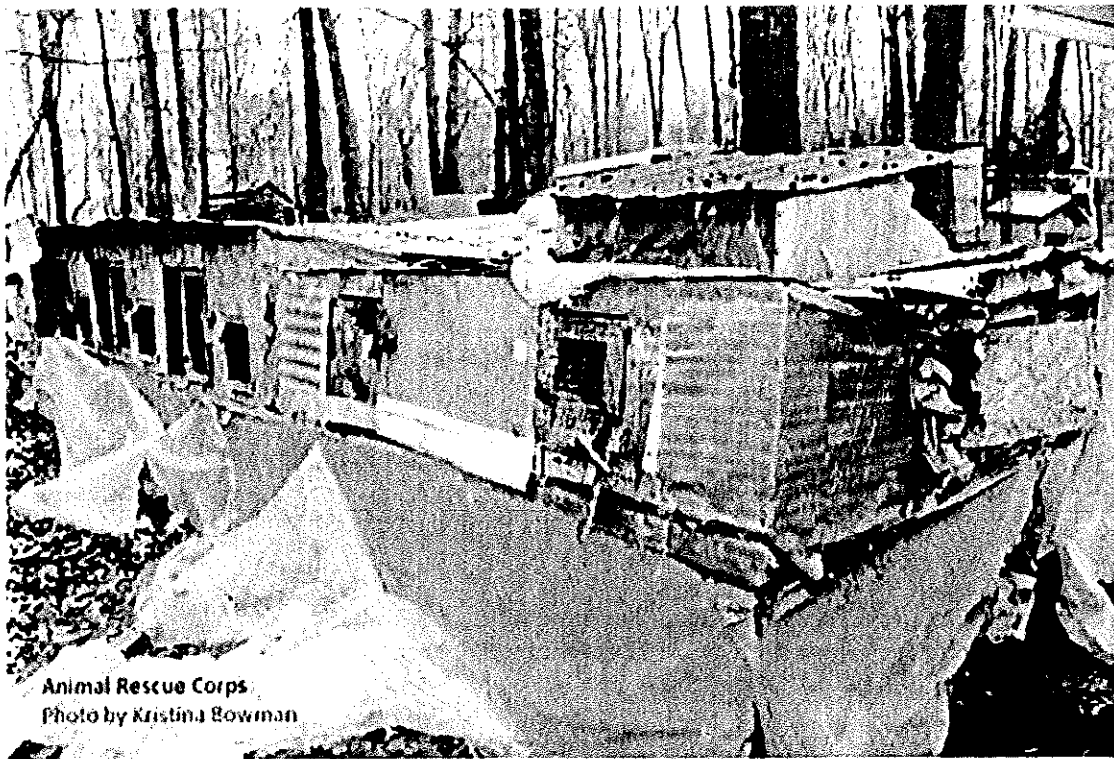
This is the bottom line. We cannot stop mass cruelty like Hunte and others- that would be done on a federal level But when we allow animals to be transported here and sold, right here, in Connecticut, we are supporting animal cruelty, not to mention the millions of dogs and cats that are murdered each year because of pet overpopulation. This is insanity. **There is no reason that pet stores can't resource their animals from responsible pet rescue groups and shelters like the one I volunteer for, and still stay in business.**

Dogs sold in stores are not only typically sick, they come from an industry of pain, suffering and cruelty all in the name of money. It is consumer fraud. It is an industry, and as such is run by money. Only when politicians stop accepting campaign money from animal store groups and start accepting responsibility for how we treat animals in our society will things change. Considering congress's low approval rating and complete inability to agree on anything, can we at least agree that we will stop animal cruelty at our borders? This is something that your constituents can all get behind. We have a golden opportunity, right here in Connecticut, for that change. Please make it happen. You will have the support.

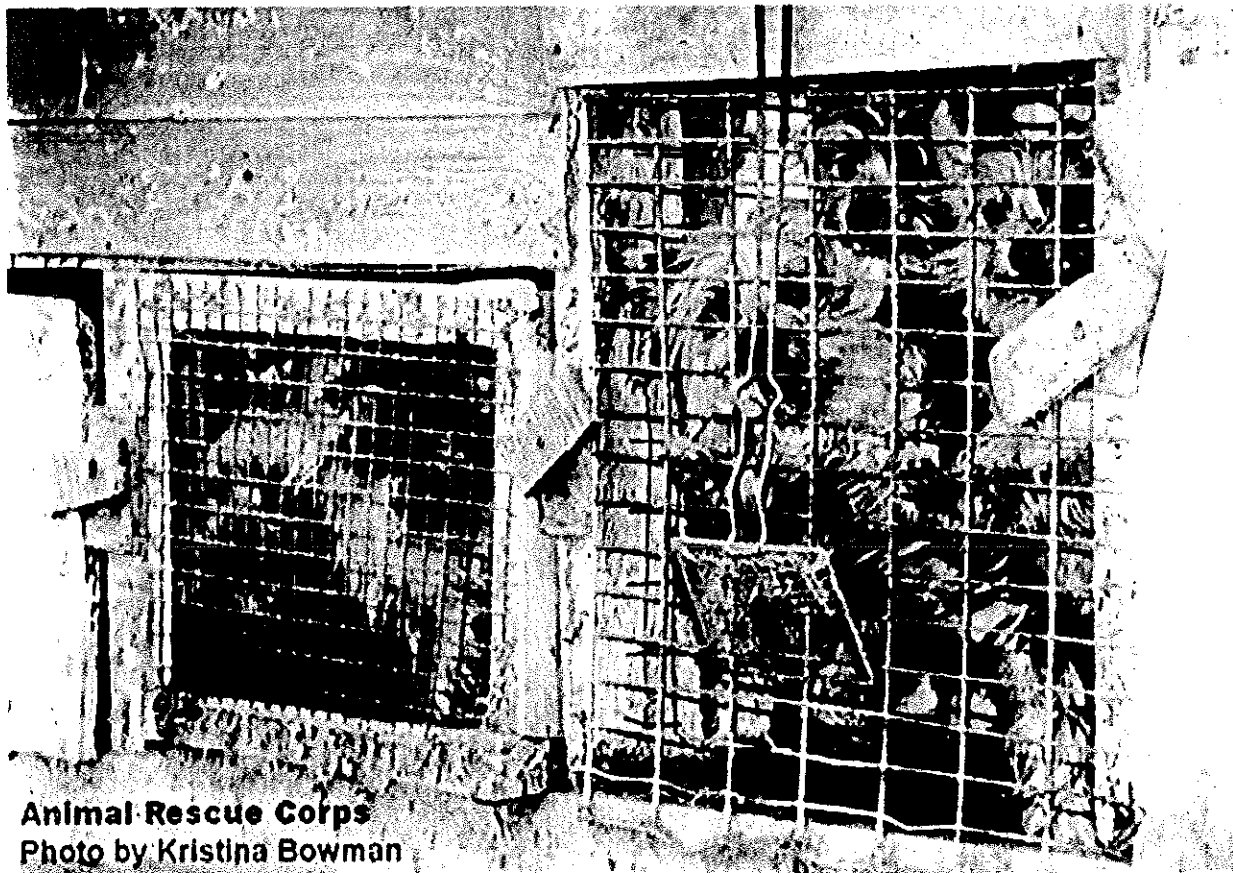
These statistics have been cited by Humane Society of the Unites States, the ASPCA, as well as numerous investigations, backed up with video documentation. Please see these sites for further information:

<http://www.caps-web.org/> Click on Reports/Videos then Hunte
<http://www.sourcewatch.org>
<http://www.humanesociety.org>
<http://www.asPCA.org>
<http://animalrescuecorps.org/learn/puppy-mills/>

These are examples of where "puppy brokers" get their dogs from
Images from AnimalRescueCorps.org



Animal Rescue Corps
Photo by Kristina Bowman



Animal Rescue Corps
Photo by Kristina Bowman

The PET COMPANY

Store #28
Danbury Fair Mall – Suite 334
7 Backus Avenue
Danbury, CT 06810

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGIN

Breeder or Broker USDA# 43-B-123

Example: Breeder XX - A - XXXX
Broker XX - B - XXXX

Breed Pomeranian Sex F Color WLF SBI, Blk msk

Breeder Name Ginny Hinderer

Breeder's Address 1336 Southwest 85th

City Wakarusa State KS

Broker Name Hunte

Broker's Address 121 N. Rockhill Blvd

City Cordman State MO

Back yard breeder

Massive puppy broker

- 1). A COPY OF THIS CERTIFICATE MUST BE GIVEN TO THE CONSUMER AT THE TIME OF SALE.
- 2). A COPY OF THIS CERTIFICATE MUST BE ON FILE WITH THE CT. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE WITHIN 2-DAYS OF THE DATE OF SALE OF THE ANIMAL.