

## Testimony of Lori Nicholson Branford Connecticut: Retooling for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### The Situation:

- The humane sourcing of dogs **cannot be guaranteed** by the pet store owner. Visits to kennels, although unverified, are stated as 3-4 years apart by pet shop owners.
- **The USDA is not the answer.** There are approximately 105 inspectors' nationwide inspecting over 10,000 AWA facilities (Animal Welfare Act) Underfunded, overwhelmed and part of a dysfunctional federal government. They inspect once a year. Twice if corrections are mandated. Many times "no responsible adult is available for re-inspection."
- **The AKC is not the answer.** There are 9 field inspectors nationwide. The AKC is lax in its inspections and often lobbies against animal rights bills because they would cut into dog registration fees. A significant percentage of their \$61 million in annual revenue comes from puppy mills. The fox guarding the hen house.
- **Public education will continue to damage pet store public relations.** There has been a **48% decline** in USDA Licensed breeders since 2007; Pet Stores focused on selling puppies have **declined 46% since 2007**. During the ordinance discussions in Branford, All Pets Club saw an **8% decrease** in revenue.
- Pet store puppies v. noncommercial breeders had **significant risk factors** regarding bad behaviors including owner aggression. "The authors cannot recommend that puppies be obtained from pet stores."(J AM Vet Med Assoc. 2013;242, 1359-1363)
- **Given the facts:** Consumers would not support the purchase of a puppy from a pet store if they knew: An **8 week old lab puppy** has been acclimated to Kansas temperatures of **18 degrees**. Come from mills with numerous violations.
- "Conditions in commercial mills are **injurious** to the mental health and welfare of dogs."(Applied Animal Behavioral Science, 2011)
- Puppy mills have been recognized by the Center for Disease Control as "**environmental hazards**."
- **Not every consumer** wants a shelter or rescue dog. I raised English Boxers, and believe people should have a quality purebred dog if they so choose.
- Many consumers **lack knowledge** as to where to buy a quality pure bred dog within a feasible travel distance.

## Details

- 1) The USDA is not the answer.
  - a. The budget has been consistently cut. They inspect our food, research facilities, animal exhibitors and kennels. There are approx... 105 USDA employees nationwide.
  - b. The workload just increased with the closing of the internet sales loop hole. The same number of employees will now be charged with inspecting kennels that had previously not fallen under USDA review.
  - c. **The Animal Welfare Act standards are weak and poorly enforced.**
  - d. The Federal Government is dysfunctional ( Gov. shut down, Obama Care Roll Out)
  
- 2) Pet Shop Owners cannot guarantee the humane sourcing of their dogs.
  - a. Visits to kennels are 3-4 years apart on average. This was said by all the owners testifying. Pet shop owners spend little to no time annually visiting their sources. It is doubtful that consumers purchasing puppies would do so knowing humane sourcing cannot be guaranteed under those conditions. With the USDA inspecting once a year and the pet store owner every 3-4 years a guarantee of humane living conditions is negligible.
  - b. My husband owns an international business and goes to England twice a year, and his partners come here at least twice a year. Pet store owners have not made an effort to assure quality living conditions or lineage. Many puppies are coming from substandard registries, not AKC.
  
- 3) Consumers are misinformed and uninformed
  - a. Direct and Indirect Violations would not be tolerated by the consumer.
  - b. Few consumers know just how minimal and weak the Animal Welfare Act is and given the facts would not tolerate cages with 6" of headroom or non-climate controlled.
  - c. Parent dogs living 24/7 in a cage would not be tolerated by the consumer.
  - d. Few consumers know that some pet store puppies are being "shipped" 1,400 miles and traveling for 22 hours. That many are warehoused in facilities with thousands of dogs.
  - e. That all or most puppies coming to CT pet stores come from the puppy mill belt ( Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania)
  - f. There is a **lack of transparency in this industry**
  
- 4) Focus on the Pet Store
  - a. Consumers are most comfortable there. Many are not comfortable visiting the animal shelter or a breeder's private home.
  - b. It is the logical place to provide information, products and services to the public.
  - c. The American Pet Products Industry annual report shows that "live animal purchases "have the lowest growth, less than 1%. Products and services are seeing annual growth of 4%-8%.
  - d. Petco has seen a 155% increase in revenue in the past 5 years. They do not sell puppies
  - e. PetSmart saw a net profit increase of 21% in 2012 compared with 2011. They do not sell puppies but have helped to place over 5 million pets in homes.

## 5) Traditional Breeders v Commercial Mills

- a. Traditional breeders breed for health, conformation and temperament. Commercial Mills breed for maximum profits.
- b. Research has shown that mill dogs, and their offspring exhibit many more behavioral problems compared with dogs from traditional breeders.
- c. A code of ethics prohibits a traditional breeder from selling a puppy to a pet store.
- d. Responsible breeders never ship puppies to unseen buyers.

### The Question:

- How do we meet consumer demand for the humane sourcing of dogs?
- How do we keep stores open and people employed?

### A Solution:

- A 2 year window to re-tool for CT Pet Stores
- The Pet Store as the Information Highway
- Revenue generated by advertising online and in store
- Revenue generated by commissions
- Breeder referral system
- Veterinary Referrals and testimonials
- Trainers
- Groomers
- Pet Insurance
- In home pet sitting services, doggie day care, dog walkers
- Adoption events and the welcome packages
- Meet the Breed events-talk to the Breeders,
- Have a booth at dog shows and trials
- Seminars on breed specifics, nutrition, health and well being
- What's new in veterinary medicine seminars
- Agility training events
- Pet Care Classes for Children-coupled with birthday parties, or meet the breed
- Meet a therapy dog, train your dog to be a therapy dog
- Pet First Aid & CPR Classes and Supplies

## Will this work?

- We live in the Information Age. The consumer will not support the commercial mill industry given the facts. Shelters and rescues account for 39%- 44% of adoptions according to an AVMA study. The pet store rather than excluding themselves from rescues and shelters could **profit handsomely by selling welcome packages** and hosting events. Consumers with a conscience will applaud this model as is indicated by the increase in adoptions.(statistics available)
- The pet store is the most obvious place to have your pet needs met. A one stop shopping experience for all information. From the purchase of a purebred dog to a rescue or shelter animal. **Paid advertisers** on the website and in store.
- Traditional breeders will maintain control over health, temperament, conformation and ownership. Guaranteeing humane sourcing of puppies.
- There are currently, **114 breeders** (of the most popular breeds) with **729 puppies** available within a **200 mile radius** of Hartford.

*This is by no means an anti-business proposal. I come from a family of job creators and business owners. My Uncle started an aerospace business, where my father and siblings worked for 40 years. My husband owns an international company that makes seals for jet engines. My brother –in –law owns a voice evacuation business with clients as far away as Dubai. My sister is self-employed and owns her own graphic design business. I was a self-employed professional musician for 30 years. I performed in 45 countries worldwide. It is that experience that led me to see a more creative solution to the problem of humane sourcing of pets. I am also a former boxer breeder.*

- 1) *The agents made a commission every time I performed.*
- 2) *The agents are themselves a peer reviewed group and the talent brokered is vetted by the agents.*
- 3) *The pet store like an agent can provide consumers with vetted talent, or traditional breeders within a feasible travel distance. (The list is available)*
- 4) *This model would put the wellbeing of dogs in the hands of the people who do it best. It gives the store the opportunity to be the informational hub for the humane sourcing of the family pet. A data base kept up to date with all the puppies currently available.*
- 5) *The pet store would no longer be in constant **damage control mode** over the puppy mill issue and bad PR.*

*Whether it is by commission on sales, providing information for a fee, or through advertising, this same model can be applied to the brick and mortar store. Minus, transportation cost, veterinarian bills and law suits.*

*For example: In 2013, my husband and I spent \$1500 on in-home pet sitting services'. This is just one example of untapped revenue. Consumers may purchase a puppy and shop for food elsewhere. Offering services, products and information lasts the lifetime of the dog.*

*It's time to re-tool in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*