

THE MICHIGAN DOG BREEDING LANDSCAPE

A Study of Licensed Dog Kennels in 2009

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and members of the Puppy Mill Awareness Meetup of Southeast Michigan conducted a study of county licensed breeding facilities in Michigan with a goal of determining how many large commercial breeders are operating. This research project began in October, 2009, and is still in progress. It is based on all county kennel licenses issued in 2009, including breeding, boarding, pet sitting, grooming, shelters, rescues and more.

As of February 2010, 45 of the 83 county kennel lists have been collected and reviewed (54% complete).

Gratiot County has 128 kennel licenses with only nine licensed to have between 11-40 dogs. One breeding kennel is allowed to have over 41 dogs. Mecosta County has 38 licensed kennels.

USDA Breeders are included in the database, but have not been reviewed. There are 45 USDA Licensed kennels which may include more than dog breeders.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Of the 1,067 kennels reviewed, 450 are breeding facilities (42%).
- Of the 450 breeding facilities, 17 have over 49 dogs (4%).
- Of the 1,067 kennels reviewed, 9 have more than 4 types of breeds.
- Of the 450 breeding facilities, 87 are advertising online and in classified ads.
- Of the 450 breeding facilities, 17 are producing the popular “designer dogs”, such as Yorkie-poos, Cock-a-Poos, and Labradoodles.
- We found 2 kennels who were involved in prior cruelty cases.
- Of the 1,067 kennels reviewed, 51 were hunting related and 23 involved sled dogs. Only one kennel of these types had over 50 dogs.
- The most popular breed category is Beagles with 72 different kennels.

GOAL

We are examining thousands of kennel licenses in an attempt to determine how many active breeders are operating in Michigan and if they were potential puppy mill operations.

The project hopes to shed light on the following questions:

- ☞ How many dog kennels are breeding facilities?

- 🖱️ How many breeding facilities house more than >30 and >50 dogs.
- 🖱️ How many breeding facilities have more than 4 types of breeds?
- 🖱️ How many breeding facilities are advertising puppies on popular puppy selling sites and classified. Were they advertising out of state?
- 🖱️ How many breeding facilities are producing designer dogs?

RECENT PUPPY MILL BUSTS

2009 - 69 dogs seized

Joan Skillman
Ingham County
[Case Details](#)

2009 - 33 dogs seized

Ackley Kennels
Washtenaw County
[33 Dogs Seized in Kennel Raid](#)
[Humane society says seized dogs doing OK](#)

2008- 67 Dogs seized

Lorri Nichiow (Lornich Kennels)
Macomb County
[Case Details](#)

2008 - Almost 60 animals seized

Patrick & Dixie Plunkett
Sanilac County
[Case Details](#)

2007 - 232 Dogs

John & Suzette Jones
Barry County
[Case Details](#)

2006 - Over 80 dogs seized

Virginia Lawrence
Calhoun County
[Case Details](#)

2005 - 79 dogs seized

Pamela Keehbauch
Isabella County
[Case Details](#)

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN INTERNET ADS AND PUPPY MILLS

Why are we interested in kennels that are advertising? The HSUS recently completed a study of internet puppy ads. They found small volume breeders who produce just a few litters a year typically sell their puppies locally by placing newspaper ads or relying on word of mouth within their communities. If they do have a website it is typically an individual hobby site where they may post photos of their stud dogs and announce the occasional litter or event, but these hobby websites are not primarily used for advertising. These breeders are far less likely to go through the inconvenience of dealing with long-distance sellers or the expense of transporting animals by air or pet transport companies.

Breeders who advertise on major pet classified sites and ship puppies to other states are typically producing more dogs than they can readily sell within their own communities and are more likely to be puppy mills or high volume breeders. The two largest national puppy sales sites include PuppyFind and NextDayPets, which seem to be designed to encourage long-distance sales rather than face-to-face transactions.

According to their report, the HSUS receives a significant number of complaints about puppies sold via local classified ads as well, so Kijiji was also studied. Kijiji is believed to be the most popular local free classified website that allows puppy ads (Craigslist and EBay generally do not permit ads for live animals).

BREED POPULARITY

Out of 1,067 facilities reviewed so far, we found by far, Beagles are the most popular breed with 72 facilities. Of these, 59 were confirmed to be breeding facilities with under 50 dogs. Of these, 8 were confirmed to be hunting related. The next three most popular breeds include: Labradors (40), German Shepherds (27) and Gold Retrievers (24). Hounds (21), Cocker Spaniels (18) and German Shorthaired Pointers (10) dogs also top the list. All of these breeds are popular hunting breeds which suggest hunting related kennels are Michigan's most common licensed kennel.

Sled dog kennels also clearly dominate the northern county landscape. We found 22 sled dog and 17 Husky facilities. Only 3 are confirmed breeding facilities. Only one facility has over 50 dogs.

Our research shows 9 of the 20 most popular breeds are toy-sized and "trendy" breeds – such as Yorkies (24), poodles (17), Shih-tzu (17), Pomeranians (13), Chihuahuas (14), Pugs (11), Boston Terries (10) Maltese (10), and Corgies (9). This correlates closely with the type of dogs most often seen in puppy mills during the recent raids that The HSUS has been involved in.

USING THIS INFORMATION TO SUPPORT COMMERCIAL KENNEL CAPS

The HSUS has supported bills in numerous states that would limit the number of breeding dogs that an individual or kennel may own, typically to 50 adult dogs. The information we have gathered can help demonstrate how reasonable these caps are. For example, a breeder with 40 female breeding dogs can produce 80 litters per year. With an average of 5.12 puppies per litter (average litter size of the top ten most popular AKC dog breeds), the breeder can produce 409 puppies a year. At an average sale price of \$596 per puppy, a breeder operating within the cap can make \$243,764.00 a year. This seems to indicate that puppy producers who would be affected by the cap can still make a significant income selling dogs, and are not what most people would consider small hobby businesses.

Example:

40 females X 2 litters a year X 5.12 pups per litter X \$596 per puppy = \$244,121.00 annual income.

This income is nearly five times the size of the national median household income of \$50,233.00 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 data).

With high-producing breeds, these individuals may make even more. For example, the average litter size of a Labrador retriever, the most popular AKC breed, is 7.5 puppies, and the average sale price for a Labrador puppy offered online is \$615.

Example:

40 females X 2 litters a year X 7.5 pups per litter X \$615 per puppy = \$369,000.00 annual income.

These numbers show that individuals affected by the caps are not small hobby breeders, who would typically produce far fewer puppies per year. In fact, even breeding businesses that fall just under a cap of 50 adult dogs may be businesses of significant size and income.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this research can be used to provide data to key decision makers to demonstrate the need for caps and to encourage changes in public policy that will help crack down on puppy mills. This research may help persuade lawmakers that better regulation of large commercial facilities may prevent commercial breeders from coming to our state.

The information may also be used in discussion with breed club representatives, dog registry organizations, and other groups that The HSUS may seek to partner with when discussing regulation of the commercial puppy trade.