Man’s Best Friend?

Lassie, Old Yeller’, Snoopy... what do these familiar and iconic faces have in common, they are all considered man’s best friend. However, many individuals are unaware of the inhumanity that many dogs face through the establishment of dog mills, more commonly referred to as “puppy mills.” Puppy mills are continually used as a method to breed multiple dogs to be sold for a profit. The dogs that are sold are often unfit to be raised as pets and suffer from not only altered personalities, but numerous health problems as result from being raised in poor conditions. In addition to inhumane treatment of these dogs puppy mills are beginning to become an issue for our environment and health. However, with the proper regulations placed on what a pet store, or online seller, may or may not sell as a “healthy dog” puppy mills with be forced to either change their unethical ways, or find themselves in need to shut down their establishment. Creating strict regulations on what qualifies as a “healthy dog” is the most effective way to force breeders in puppy mills to reevaluate their “business” and force them to change the treatment of these dogs, despite the popular belief that opening your home to an animal from a shelter is the best way to protest puppy mills.

Puppy Mills are, essentially, a breeding factor where the desired product is a puppy to be sold to both pet stores and online buyers. Since puppy mills’ main concern is breeding a puppy to be sold for a profit, the animals are denied clean living spaces, human contact, and proper veterinary care (ASPCA). The animals that are raised in such places often have lifelong health problems as well as altered personalities. Whenever an animal is raised in an environment that limits contact with humans the animal either becomes excessively aggressive or timid which, depending on the household, can cause owners to abandon the dog or sell the animal to another unsuspecting buyer (ASPCA). Though not all dogs raised in puppy mills suffer from such altered personalities, the animals which appear to be of even temper are still highly likely to suffer from lifelong illness from the poor living situation faced as a puppy. For instance, one couple who had purchased a Japanese Chin from a pet store soon discovered that the dog suffered from kennel cough and over the course of 2 weeks the dog’s health had rapidly declined (Higgins). The couple managed to nurse their dog back to health; however, the couple spent nearly $900 for veterinary care, which many families are unwilling to pay (Higgins). In the end, these “factory dogs” are often pets which are ill fit to interact with or be cared for by individuals, let alone being a household family companions.  
  
 In addition to the inhumane treatment of dogs, puppy mills are beginning to negatively affect the environment. In Maryland the Chesapeake Bay’s crab population is beginning to dramatically decline due to the poor sanitation of local puppy mills. The nearby puppy mill waste, such as feces and animal carcasses, had seeped into the bay as result of the improper disposal of puppy mill waste. From the improperly disposed of waste bacteria has run off into the bay whenever rain fell (Moore). The nitrogen emissions from the waste runoff have resulted in the decline of the crab population. In 2008 in was declared that nearly 20,000,000 crabs would be needed to repopulate the Chesapeake Bay as result of poor sanitation from surrounding puppy mill farms, however the current crab population stands at around 120,000,000 (Moore). Given that the 120,000,000 crabs in the bay are enough to repopulate the area, it has been estimated that it will take nearly 10 years to rebuild the population to what it was before the pollution had occurred. As a result of this decline Maryland law has set a limit on the number of crabs that can be caught in a year, yet remains to create a law that controls the use of puppy mill waste as fertilizer on farms (Moore).  
  
 Though puppy mills are clearly detrimental to the environment, in addition to being inhuman to dogs, many individuals are unaware of the harm that puppy mills create in their own lives. In the year 2008 animal remains were discovered in a Pennsylvanian farmer’s growing fields, more specifically, dog remains. The farmer was a breeder for a puppy mill and had been using the remains of deceased dogs to fertilize the same fields that he grows produce, which will be sold, on (Moore). One dog’s body that was recovered from the fields was analyzed and it was determined that given her apparent age she had not passed due to old age, yet bullets were not recovered from the body, meaning that this dog’s death was most likely result of disease from poor care (Moore). In addition to the use of dogs as fertilizer the same farmer was reported saying that he also used the feces and urine from his puppy mill as a type of fertilizer for his growing fields (Moore). Given the understanding that the dogs in puppy mills are denied proper veterinary care the “fertilizer” acquired from puppy mills most likely carry diseases which, when placed in the same growing field as produce, can negatively affect whatever is grown in the field. As a result, buyers of produce in local markets unknowingly purchase fruits and vegetables that grow alongside the bodies and feces of diseased animals.

Puppy mill dogs, in many cases, face serious health issues which can result in the owner spending more money on veterinary bills than the dog had originally cost him or her, nevertheless, breeders continue to carry out business with pet stores (ASPCA). The animals, which are sold to the pet store, are expected to pass an exam that declared if the animal is healthy enough to be sold. However, the current requirements for pets to be sold to pet stores are ambiguously defined and lack strict enforcement by pet stores (ASPCA). With the the addition of a policy requiring all breeders to have their dogs to be sold go through an extensive examination by a reputable veterinarian before being sold to pet stores, the number of ill pets carried in a pet store will therefore decrease as result of breeders raising the level of care given to the animal. Since these stores have a fairly relaxed policy animals, which are unfit to be sold to a family, are placed in stores and fail to help discontinue the practice of breeding on puppy mills (Higgins).   
  
 In the past individuals have believed that the ideal way to discontinue the practice of breeding in puppy mills is to simply adopt from animal shelters, however, with the ever present demand for pet dogs adoption is no longer enough help. Whenever an individual adopts an animal from a shelter, even though they have helped by themselves not purchasing from a pet store, there are still more individuals who are unaware of puppy mills and continue to purchase from pet stores (ASPCA). With the implementation of a policy that requires breeders to sell animals that have passed a health examination the breeder will need to make the health of his or her animals a priority if he or she wishes to continue breeding dogs to be sold to pet stores. The requirements to have his or her animals to pass health examinations will either serve as an incentive to provide better living situations or force the breeder to discontinue his or her puppy mill practice. Although adopting is a great help in trying to discontinue the use of puppy mills, the ever present demand for dogs requires more than a few individuals choosing to adopt their pets to change the way that puppy mill breeders treat their dogs.  
  
 Puppy mills are simply breeding factories, producing puppies for no other reason than to be sold to pet stores for a profit, therefore as long as there is a demand they will continue supplying the animals to the stores. The effects of puppy mills no longer pertain solely to dogs and are beginning to harm the environment as well as our personal health. Although the effects of puppy mills are rather grim, with the proper regulations the majority of puppy mills will be forced to shut down or change the way that they handle breeding and caring for the dogs that they breed if they wish to continue selling to pet stores. Unless action is taken against puppy mills in the form of a policy that regulates the level of health required to sell a dog to a pet store, puppy mills will continue to thrive. Considering that puppy mills are thriving despite the number of individuals adopting from animal shelters, simply adopting is no longer enough help. With the use of a policy that requires breeders to provide an animal that passes a health examination buyers from pet stores can rest assured that the animal they bring home is healthy and is more than simply an animal that was sold to make a profit and can better the way that mankind treats “man’s best friend.”