



Puppy Mills, Dog Shows, and the American Kennel Club

Recently, a letter appeared in the nationally syndicated *Animal Doctor* column in numerous newspapers across the country, including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, authored by the vice president of public relations for the American Kennel Club (AKC). This letter was an attempt to convince the column's editor, veterinarian Dr. Michael Fox, and the public, that the AKC actually cares about the humane treatment of dogs. The letter boasted of AKC's inspection program of dog breeders to ensure humane care and publicized the fact that AKC has a legislation department that advocates for the welfare of dogs.

The Alliance quickly responded with a letter of our own pointing out that the AKC inspection program is a sham as the AKC standards of care are abysmal and breeders are given advance notice of AKC inspections. We also pointed out that AKC consistently opposes all animal welfare legislation. We even exposed the fact that AKC dog shows are subsidized by registration fees from puppy mills.

Not surprisingly, AKC took offense at our letter and responded with half-truths and more propaganda. The AKC took particular offense to our allegation that AKC sponsored dog shows are financed on the backs of puppy mill dogs through AKC registration fees. Fortunately, the *Animal Doctor* column allowed us to respond and set the record straight. We quoted a prior admission by the president of the AKC that registration fees, do in fact, support dog shows. We also cited communications from AKC's vice president of marketing addressed to the commercial dog breeding industry **boasting that one of the purposes of AKC dog shows is to help commercial breeders sell puppy mill dogs.**



AKC Dog Shows Financed by the Cruelty of Puppy Mills

Dear Dr. Fox,

The American Kennel is the largest purebred registry in the world; however we are, first and foremost, an advocate for all dogs. The AKC is not, as you stated, “simply a registry that issues pedigree papers, essentially without any policing of the sources the dogs come from — notably puppy mills.”

The American Kennel Club registers dogs. We do not register kennels or breeders. We are not a government organization, so we can only address situations surrounding dogs that are registered with us. AKC is dedicated to ensuring the wellbeing of all dogs and in no way condones or supports substandard care or “puppy mills.” If we find anyone engaging in behavior that is detrimental to the health of any dog, we report them to the local authorities.

AKC’s Compliance Department conducts thousands of inspections every year of breeders who register their litters and dogs with us. We have strict policies to which breeders must adhere for the proper care and conditions of the dogs. Our inspectors work tirelessly to ensure that our breeders are doing what is best for the dogs. We also have boards and committees to evaluate complaints regarding breeders and improper practices. We take each complaint very seriously and have a series of disciplinary actions that can be implemented when necessary.

Additionally, we work diligently in several areas on behalf of dogs and their owners. The AKC founded the Canine Health Foundation in 1995 and has donated more than \$24 million to study the genetics of disease and improve the health and wellbeing of all dogs. The AKC is the only registry that incorporates health testing into its pedigree records.

The AKC also founded AKC Reunite, which promotes microchipping and has reunited more than 400,000 lost pets with their owners. AKC Reunite’s Pet Disaster Relief Program provides emergency pet shelter/care trailers which are donated to communities throughout the United States to protect pets in case of a natural disaster or emergency situation.

The AKC Humane Fund supports breed rescue and helps domestic violence shelters make arrangements so that victims can bring a pet with them when seeking shelter from an abusive situation.

AKC is proud to work with thousands of volunteers throughout the country who donate their time to educate the public about responsible dog ownership and provide useful information to enhance every dog's life, regardless of breed. The AKC is also active in the future of veterinary medicine by providing scholarships and grants to universities for the advancement of their veterinary medicine.

Our Government Relations department monitors thousands of legislative and regulatory proposals nationwide every year that impact dog ownership. AKC advocates for legislation that encourages responsible dog ownership, advances the welfare of dogs and protects the rights of their owners.

The AKC also had several options for Breeder education and health testing which includes our Bred with H.E.A.R.T program and various breeder education courses. These courses are completely free, consistently increasing to provide Breeders with the most up-to-date knowledge possible.

No organization does more for dogs than the American Kennel Club. Dogs are a major part of our lives and the world around us. Our advocacy makes the world a better place for all of us, and ensures that our dogs can live their happiest and healthiest lives possible.

Brandi Hunter

Vice President, Public Relations and Communications

Dear Dr. Fox:

The American Kennel Club inspection program of breeders' kennels is a sham. Its standards of care are bare minimum and can best be described as "survival standards" —certainly not humane standards of care.

For example, a dog's primary enclosure needs to be only large enough so the dog "can sit, stand, lie down or turn around." This tiny space is the required living area for a breeding dog for her entire existence. Most troubling, there is no enforcement of the standards of care.

According to the AKC, the breeder is given at least one week's notice before an inspection. One need only review the paltry number of suspensions handed out by the AKC, based on the findings of their inspectors, to recognize the lack of enforcement.

The vast majority of suspensions are the result of investigations by federal and state inspectors or local humane agents. Many dogs rescued from puppy mills are AKC-registered, from facilities previously inspected by the AKC.

Shockingly, although the AKC promotes the fact that it has promulgated “standards of care” for AKC breeders, when legislation was introduced in North Carolina to codify similar basic standards of care, the AKC actively worked in opposition to the legislation. The AKC is fine with standards of care as long as they are never enforced or codified into law.

The entry fees for dog shows do not cover AKC expenses for sponsoring the shows. Thus, registration fees subsidize AKC dog shows. The next time you watch a dog show on television, be aware that it is being supported on the backs of puppy mill dogs.

Bob Baker, executive director, Missouri Alliance

for Animal Legislation

Dr. Fox: It is my understanding that you are with an organization that has inspected puppy mills, rescued puppies and adult breeding stock, sought to improve their care for several years, and met resistance at every turn.

In some states, local legislators and the oversight of agricultural and other official bodies still generally perceive these commercial dog farms as producing mere commodities, much like a poultry or pig factory farm. Such livestock producers see any legislation to improve dogs’ welfare in these puppy factories as a potential threat to their own inhumane business practices.

I was one of the first in the United States to document these inhumane systems of food-animal production, and with the late Herm David, among the first to blow the whistle on puppy mills in the 1970s. We shared our concerns with the American Kennel Club and the dog-breeding community at large. The AKC’s new voluntary “Bred With HEART” program, which ostensibly addresses this issue, may be too little, too late.

Every purebred and “designer” puppy sold should come with a purchase agreement that includes the list of known genetic and related health problems that the breed and lineage may carry; the estimated veterinary costs for treating each condition and the probability of developing one; plus an objective quality of life assessment score from zero to five stars. For details, see my report “Recovering Canine Health” on my website, drfoxvet.net.

Puppy mills, dog shows and the American Kennel Club

Dear Dr. Fox:

Once again, I must reach out to you because you ran a letter that includes false statements about the American Kennel Club.

First and foremost: We do not “sponsor” dog shows. The AKC approves local members or licensed dog clubs to hold events under our rules and regulations. The individual clubs or organizations put on dog shows at their own expense. The money does not come from AKC registrations.

As for our inspection process, we do both announced and unannounced inspections. There is no policy stating that the AKC gives a one-week notice for inspections. Any breeder who refuses our inspection is prohibited from using AKC services.

As for any of our suspensions, breeders who are not in compliance with our policies are put on referral, which is a temporary suspension that is lifted only when they come into complete compliance. It should also be noted that we are not the only registry in the United States. There are at least 20 others that people choose to do business with, meaning not all of their dogs may be registered with us.

Lastly, there was a statement regarding the majority of dogs rescued from puppy mills being AKC-registered dogs. That could not be further from the truth. A study conducted by the National Animal Interest Alliance in 2015 found that less than 5 percent of all dogs in shelters were purebred dogs. That hardly coincides with any majority.

To be clear, just because a breeder has registered dogs with us, that does not mean that they use our registry services for all their dogs. That remains at the discretion of the breeder, as do their ethical practices.

Brandi Hunter, vice president of public relations,

American Kennel Club, New York

Dr. Fox: Here is the reply from the writer of the letter to which you refer:

“In reference to the AKC’s claim that it does not ‘sponsor’ dog shows, the AKC is simply playing a game of semantics. According to information contained in AKC annual reports and information displayed on its website, the AKC sanctions, regulates and licenses dog shows; approves the judges for the shows; and processes plans and maintains records for the shows.

“Dennis Sprung, the president of the AKC, in an article for Dog News, stated that individual dog registration fees bear the costs of supporting events (dog shows). Sprung went on to say, ‘Last but not least, the financial impact of declining registrations speaks for itself. This revenue enables our ability to continue all the good work AKC does to support events.’

“If the AKC prefers the word ‘support,’ as used by its president, over the word ‘sponsor,’ I am more than willing to change my original letter to read that the AKC-‘supported’ dog shows are sustained on the backs of puppy mill dogs through AKC registration fees.

“In reference to the AKC’s statement, ‘there is no policy stating that the AKC gives a one-week notice for inspection,’ an AKC flier detailing what to expect with an AKC inspection states, ‘Your AKC Executive Field Agent will typically call you about a week in advance to set up a day for your inspection.’ While the AKC might not have a policy statement requiring a one-week notice, it also does not have a policy requiring an unannounced inspection.

“I want to emphasize that my letter never alleged that the majority of dogs being rescued from puppy mills were AKC-registered dogs. My letter stated, ‘Many dogs rescued from puppy mills are AKC-registered.’”

“I just came across an article in a 2012 Kennel Spotlight, a trade publication for commercial dog breeders. (Note: The magazine’s publisher was at one time the largest dog broker in the country.) Mike Ganey, vice president of marketing for the AKC, indicates in the article that AKC events are for the purpose of having a ‘positive impact on your business whether you are a breeder selling to distributors, dealers, pet stores or direct to customers.’ He goes on to tell commercial breeders that AKC events help ‘create preference and demand for purebreds, no matter where the consumer chooses to buy their purebred dogs.’

“This article tells puppy millers that one of the purposes of AKC dog shows is to help sell puppy mill dogs. You can see that article in full at the following link:

Bob Baker, executive director of the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation, St. Louis