

Below is an article by Charlotte Clem McGowan. Charlotte is a noted breeder/judge, the AKC Legislative Liaison for the American Shetland Sheepdog Association and was given an award by AKC a couple of years ago for her legislative work.

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## What is a Puppy Mill by Charlotte Clem McGowan

I cringe now when I hear the phrase "puppy mill." What I have to say may not win any popularity contests for me but it needs to be said.

1. What is a puppy mill? You have your definition I am sure. But there is no LEGAL definition of a puppy mill. Because we in the fancy have freely thrown this phrase around, we have actually aided the animal rights activists. As far as the animal rights activists are concerned, a puppy mill is anyone who purposefully breeds ANY dogs, even a single litter! I will bet you do not agree with this definition. But take a look at Calif. AB 1634 and see what's going on. In terms of AB 1634, you breed a litter, you're a PROBLEM! That's the way that bill is framed.

2. If there is no legal definition of a puppy mill, should we be in favor of preventing all breeding of dogs based on our own personal definition of a "puppy mill?" I think not. People want pets. You and I don't breed enough to supply them. Think about that!

3. Can we agree there is a definition of a puppy mill? I think not. Ask 10 fanciers independently and you will get 10 different answers. So what does the public think? How does the public (not dog breeders) define a puppy mill? Here is where the AR's have used us. They talk about "overpopulation" and the need to stop ALL breeding. We talk about "puppymills" and stopping puppy mills. So the public is now confused since there is no legal definition of a puppy mill. The public is beginning to view breeders, all breeders, as puppy mills. We have contributed to public perception. We don't breed enough to supply the public's desire for pets but we oppose breeding by others who see a need and plan to fill it for profit.

4. We need to stop buying into the "overpopulation" rhetoric. People want pets and people will have pets. It is a matter of who will supply those pets. We need to focus the public on the value of purebreds over the various doddles and poos and mutts imported from Mexico, Puerto Rico and everywhere else. As long as we talk about "puppy mills" we are missing the boat. Talk about substandard kennels if you like. Talk about conditions. No one approves of dogs badly kept. Talk about diseases brought in by mutts from tropical climates. But don't talk about puppy mills.

5. Petland and Hunte exist for a reason: people want pets. They are commercial entities. We hobbyists don't like the idea of commercial entities. That's been clear for ever so long. Does that mean that all commercial sellers are "puppy mills?" Well, there is no legal definition, please remember. Petland and Hunte probably do a much better job of selling commercial bred dogs than the mass breeders of doodles and poos and the chances of a Petland dog being healthy are way ahead of what the chances are for the mutt imported from Mexico or Puerto Rico. But the animal rights activists have been extremely successful in convincing you, the hobbyist, that all commercial bred dogs are bred in filth and squalor. In fact, that's not true. The terrible kennels of the 80's have in large part been weeded out by AKC's Inspections and Investigations department and 5000 inspections a year along with the USDA inspections. There are still some bad kennels, but guess what, there are bad hobby breeder kennels! Does that mean because you may personally know of a kennel where the dogs are not kept well, that all hobbyists are bad? Of course not. We just don't like the idea of commercially bred pets. But definitions count!

6. Historical fact: Some of our founding breeders of our own Shelties, people we all respect, made a lot of their living selling dogs including pets. People like Dot Foster (Timberidge) chief author of the current standard, Betty Whelen, excellent and beloved breeder, etc. There was a time it was ok to breed lots of dogs and sell the non showdogs for pets, and do it proudly. What happened? We all convinced ourselves we shouldn't breed too many dogs. We left the door open for commercial breeders and sellers.

7. The animal rights people have changed the landscape. If you help protest "puppy mills" please remember there is no legal definition. Some of the commercial breeders have state of the art kennels. I know you don't want to hear that, but it is true. Does a commercial kennel that is state of the art qualify as a "puppy mill?" Does your fellow breeder who breeds two extra litters of puppies a year qualify as a puppy mill? Does your single litter qualify you as a puppy mill? Depends on whose definition you use. And remember that as we fight bad legislation, we are ALL Puppy Mills according to the animal rights activists!

Let's concentrate on the real enemy: the animal rights activists who want no purposefully bred dogs at all.

Charlotte McGowan