



Position Statement: Responsible Breeders

The SF SPCA strongly encourages the adoption of pets through legitimate shelters and rescue organizations. If a suitable pet cannot be adopted then we recommend obtaining a pet only through a compassionate, responsible breeder.

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Overview

Responsible breeders are individuals who have focused their efforts on one or a select few breeds and through breeding, historical research and ongoing study, mentoring relationships, club memberships, showing, raising and training of these breeds have become knowledgeable about heritable defects, temperament and behavior¹.

Responsible breeders recognize the sale of an animal as a two-way street and they are equally interested in screening potential owners in order to ensure a long-term fit. Oftentimes, these breeders are required to comply with their breed club's Code of Ethics which might require them to refuse to sell animals to any commercial source of distribution, including an entirely virtual pet sale via the Internet. An effective way for a prospective pet owner to decrease their risk in choosing a breeder is to visit the breeder's facility and observe the animal's living condition; however, owning a pet is a long-term commitment and we encourage everyone to follow the information provided below when buying a pet.

Ways to ensure you are dealing with a responsible breeder:

- Visit the breeder's facility:
 - The breeder should definitely encourage one, if not multiple visits with your entire family *before* you are committed
 - Make sure the animals live indoors and not outside in kennel runs
 - The boarding area needs to be clean and well-maintained
- Observe the animal's behavior and socialization:
 - Puppies are kept clean, warm, fed, vetted and with their mother until weaned

- Puppies appear happy and healthy and they don't shy away from visitors
- Spend time with the puppy's parents – at a minimum the pup's mother – assess their health and temperament.
- Make sure the breeder themselves meet the gold-standard:
 - Provides references from previous adopters/customers for you to follow-up
 - Screens and counsels potential adopters/purchasers in order to find the best fit for the animal
 - Has no more than 2-3 breeds of dogs or cats
 - Candid about the positive and negative aspects of the animal or breed
 - Ensures animals are weaned before placement (8-10 weeks of age for dogs and cats)
 - Provides accurate and reliable health, vaccination and pedigree information which needs to include records of recent veterinary visits
 - Caution: a health certificate is only a brief “wellness” check by a veterinarian and does not include the diagnostic tests for genetic disorders, parasites, or diseases commonly found in puppy mill puppies such as Giardia and Brucellosis
 - Provides a veterinary reference or support materials for your puppy's guidance and care after you adopt/purchase a new pet
 - Provides an adoption/purchase contract in plain English that spells out breeder's responsibilities, adopter's responsibilities, health guarantees and return policy
 - Caution: read health guarantees very carefully. If the animal has not been given diagnostic tests past a wellness exam, any issues are often met with “the animal was sold with a perfect health certificate” even if the pet becomes sick within a few hours of purchase
- Do not be fooled by “breeder” certification or purebred registration papers:
 - Both responsible breeders and puppy mills can be “USDA licensed” breeders. A puppy mill operation can leverage their certification in order to make buyers feel comfortable without visiting their facility
 - Puppy mills routinely sell puppies with papers from prestigious sounding kennel clubs. Registration papers do nothing to ensure that an individual puppy (or his or her parents) is healthy or free of genetic defects, or that they were raised in a humane and clean environment

Warning signs that you are *NOT* working with a responsible breeder:

- Willing to sell the puppy to you without meeting you (e.g., internet or phone only)
- Seems to have puppies available at all times
- Is reluctant to show you their facilities; they might offer to ship the animal to you or meet you somewhere to drop off the animal
- Has dirty, unhealthy, and/or unsocialized animals

- Does not have proof of the specific animal's veterinary visits or vaccinations
- Also sells to pet stores, flea markets, or any other way that does not thoroughly screen the potential owners

Purchasing Pets Online:

The Internet can be a good source of information for prospective pet owners to research breeds, breeders, and pet ownership tips. However, animal sales over the internet have exacerbated the likelihood for unscrupulous breeders or brokers to sell anonymously with little fear of exposure. Many of the largest puppy mills have embraced technology as a way to minimize the costs of operating a clean, healthy, and humane facility for the care of animals given the ease of selling animals online without any legal oversight. If consumers followed the same criteria listed above when evaluating breeders on the Internet – including a mandatory on-site visit – puppy mills would be put out of business. The fact is that reputable breeders insist on meeting hopeful adopters and will never sell their animals on the internet to people they have never met.

Sources:

1. ASPCA definition: <http://www.asPCA.org/about-us/policy-positions/criteria-for-responsible-breeding.aspx>
2. HSUS
 - a. http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/pets/puppy_mills/how_find_good_dog_breeder.pdf
 - b. http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/puppy_mills/tips/finding_good_dog_breeder.html
3. ACC <http://www.sfgov2.org/index.aspx?page=1332>
4. Pet-Store (or Puppy Mill) Double-Speak
http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/puppy_mills/facts/pet_store_doublespeak.html