

Dog Breeder Regulations Added to Farm Bill

A Senate amendment has implications for cat and dog breeders as well as pet importers.

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A proposed amendment to the federal Farm Bill would regulate some hobby breeders selling more than 25 dogs or cats per year and place restrictions on importing kittens and puppies.

The amendment, modeled after the PAWS (Pet Animal Welfare Statute) bill, which was defeated last year, would amend the Animal Welfare Act to "treat a regulated person in the same manner that the Secretary treats a dealer under this Act." The proposal, however, allows for an alternative by way of third-party inspections. The third party, though, must be approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and adhere to standards "at least as protective of animal welfare" as the agency's.

Anyone raising or breeding less than 25 dogs or cats (or 6 litters, whichever is greater) per year for direct sale to a pet owner (i.e., not for resale) would be exempt. In addition to the 25 animals they raised, the breeders could sell 25 more dogs or cats that were not raised on their facilities without facing the regulation. Anyone who sells dogs and cats only at retail (i.e., not for resale) would also be exempt, as would anyone selling an annual amount of 25 or less dogs or cats that they did not raise.

The regulation does not apply to pet stores except under limited exceptions, and nonprofit animal shelters are also exempt from the regulation.

Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the amendment, entitled "Regulation of High-Volume Retailers and Importers, Nov. 15, 2007.

In addition, the bill contains language to regulate the importation of kittens and puppies and ban imports of dogs less than 6 months old. Michael Maddox of the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) says that is of concern especially in Hawaii, which imports all of its puppies from other countries, because the state's rabies-free status prevents it from buying animals from the U.S. mainland, but also for other resellers whose customers might prefer young puppies.

The proposal cited the following concerns:

"The breeding of puppies and kittens in foreign countries for resale in the United States creates opportunities and incentives for evasion of United States laws (including regulations ...the conditions under which puppies are transported into the United States for resale are frequently inhumane and ... there is an unacceptably high incidence of disease and death among puppies imported into the United States for resale."

Complicating this matter is that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) closed the comment period for its draft regulations on importation of dogs, cats and other pet animals only last Saturday, Dec. 1.

The CDC is sorting through the comments that are intended to aid the government agency when crafting its new rules on animal importation. The process could take anywhere from one to several years.

- Rose Gordon, Associate News Editor for DogChannel.com