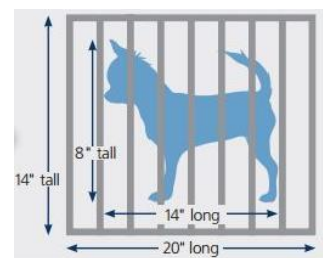


USDA'S LOW STANDARDS AND POOR ENFORCEMENT

A USDA-licensed facility may legally:

- ✓ Confine dogs in cages only 6 inches larger than their bodies for their entire lives
- ✓ Provide only coated wire flooring in cages
- ✓ Deny dogs adequate exercise and socialization
- ✓ Keep dogs in frigid or sweltering temperatures for up to 4 hours
- ✓ Breed dogs repeatedly and excessively, without limits
- ✓ Provide no regular veterinary care beyond annual walk-through of facility



A USDA license has never meant a facility was humane, as standards have always been shockingly low and enforcement has always lacked. Back in 2010, the Office of Inspector General reported that enforcement was ineffective against problem dealers. In 2021, the Inspector General [reported](#) that not much has changed as “[the USDA] is not able to ensure the overall health and humane treatment of animals at [dog breeding] facilities.”

USDA'S PRIORITIES ARE CLEAR: PROMOTE AND PROTECT PUPPY MILLS

- **July 2022:** Due to a directive from Congress, USDA [announced](#) it was ending its years long “teachable moments” policy that allowed inspectors to avoid citing breeders for failing to adhere to animal care standards. This policy was supposed to only apply to “minor violations”, but it was often abused.
- **May 2022:** The HSUS released our annual [Horrible Hundred Report](#) with documented instances of breeders with numerous and egregious violations spanning years who remain licensed and breeders who had been cited by state officials for numerous and severe violations but received clean inspection reports from USDA.
- **September 2021:** After 4 years of no significant enforcement actions against commercial breeders and not a single license revoked, USDA revoked a license, but only after [“shocking cruelty”](#) was allowed to occur for months and over 120 animal welfare citations were issued.
- **Since March 2020,** USDA has given breeders significant control over how and when inspections would occur and if inspections would occur at all. In a notice to licensees, USDA told breeders they could [avoid in-person inspections](#) by stating COVID safety concerns and that remote/virtual inspections would be allowed. Later, [USDA directed inspectors](#) not to indicate on inspection reports if an inspection was conducted remotely, leaving consumers in the dark. Meanwhile, several large puppy mill states have continued with inspections.
- **May 2020:** USDA told stakeholders it had *only 95 inspectors* charged with inspecting more than 8,000 pet dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities and that they had inspected over 1 million animals in 2019.
- **February 2020:** Due to a Congressional directive, USDA began restoring unredacted inspection reports on the online database that it had unexpectedly purged three years earlier. Restored records confirm USDA is recording violations far less than it used to and facilities are routinely refusing access to USDA inspectors.
- **August 2019:** [Washington Post reported](#) that USDA leaders told inspectors of a new policy that emphasized “education, not enforcement” and treating regulated entities “more as partners than as potential offenders.”
 - A USDA veterinarian who oversaw inspectors in 27 states told *the Post* the weakened enforcement had *caused an “untold numbers of animals” to experience unnecessary suffering.*
 - A USDA inspector for 20 years, who left at the end of 2017 told *the Post*: “It feels like your hands are tied behind your back. *You can’t do many things you’re supposed to when it comes to protecting animals.*”
 - *The Post* reported that since 2016 *citations by the USDA have plummeted 65%* and enforcement cases have declined 92%.
- **October 2018:** [Washington Post reported](#) the USDA was issuing significantly fewer written warnings than in previous years and had settled only one complaint; a USDA spokesperson told *the Post* this was in part due to “working more closely with alleged violators” rather than taking enforcement actions.