Choosing adoption means choosing compassion over convenience

By Cheryl McCormick

As someone who has dedicated her life to working towards every animal finding a loving home, it breaks my heart to see shelter animals continually passed over for inhumanely bred animals. I commonly hear people talk about wanting their specific breed and coloring of dog, going as far as spending thousands of dollars to get one. However, in shelters nationwide, there is a multitude of animals ready to give love and be loved by you.

October, National Animal Safety and Protection Month, is a crucial time to think about where our pets come from and the importance of our choices as pet owners. According to the ASPCA, more than half a million animals were euthanized in shelters last year alone. In 2024, nearly 6 million dogs and cats entered shelters and rescues in the United States. Despite this overwhelming number, commercial breeding operations, commonly known as puppy mills, continue to operate and profit from inhumane practices.

The reality of these mills is heartbreaking. Female dogs are bred repeatedly for profit, confined to cages with poor sanitation, overcrowding, and a lack of veterinary care. They spend the majority of their lives receiving little to no caretaking and are treated as a resource rather than a living animal. After breeding them for revenue, sadly, these dogs are often discarded at the end of their usefulness. As someone who works towards giving animals a better life, I am saddened to see them treated in such a way with little to no consequence.

Not only are the mothers of these puppies subjected to such a low quality of life, but their litter also suffers. Puppies born in these environments are often sickly due to the poor condition of their mother. This can result in them being subjected to a life including respiratory illnesses, genetic defects, and behavioral challenges.

While many searching for a new pet to be a part of their family may believe these puppies are “better quality” or more desirable due to their advertisements, the truth is that the cruelty of their origins provides a different outcome. The lack of care the mothers receive, combined with the unsanitary and cruel living conditions, leads to a myriad of problems for the animals down the road.

Meanwhile, millions of affectionate and loving animals are available for ethical adoption, as they wait in shelters for families to notice them. There is a common misconception that shelters only hold older or “mutt” dogs. However, shelters and rescue organizations regularly take in a multitude of puppies and desirable breeds, all of whom are just as capable of being a lovely addition to your own family. By adopting from shelters, you not only save a life, but also make space for another to receive the care it needs.

It is estimated that 10,000 puppy mills currently operate in the United States, resulting in the sales of 2.6 million puppies each year. These operations continue to function due to their demand, and the power to change that lies with us. Every time a family chooses adoption over purchasing from a breeder or store, they are directly helping to reduce this market built on cruelty. Supporting local shelters means choosing compassion over convenience.

At the Athens Area Humane Society, we're working tirelessly to end this cycle of suffering and shut down puppy mills. Together with Humane World for Animals, we've shut down more than 250 mills.

This progress can only be made possible when communities unite towards a cause. As consumers, we have tremendous influence. By refusing to support the commercial breeding industry by choosing adoption, we send a clear message that animal lives are not for sale.

If you are considering adding a new pet to be a member of your family, I encourage you to visit your local shelter or rescue. Take a chance on these animals, and you might just find the one that matches you perfectly. Together, we can bring an end to puppy mills and build a future where every animal has a chance to go to a loving home. Always remember to adopt, don't shop.

Cheryl McCormick is the CEO of the Athens Area Humane Society.