

Public Servants Face Heartbreaking Assignments

By Julia Janak

Duncan and her co-workers found themselves so shaken by the violence at Berry's farm, where 37 dachshunds were rescued, one killed and six injured, they obtained crisis therapy.

Upon entering the suspect's farm in rural Kansas, Debra Duncan and local law enforcement authorities spotted several emaciated dachshund puppies living in filthy cages, covered in sores. The resident, Danny Berry, 44, ordered Duncan and the Sheriff's Department out of his house yelling, "You're not taking my animals!" As the Deputy Sheriff approached with a search warrant, Berry flew into a rage, running back toward the cages where he grabbed one of his own dogs and killed him with a metal pipe. Berry threw six more dogs against a metal fence, injuring but not killing them, before the Deputy Sheriff could restrain him.

Luckily, this wasn't a typical day, says Debra Duncan, Director of the Kansas Animal Health Department, the agency responsible for licensing and regulating breeders. Otherwise, she would have a hard time keeping her team of six staff members. Their work can be physically difficult, but it is also emotionally difficult. Duncan and her co-workers found themselves so shaken by the violence at Berry's farm, where 37 dachshunds were rescued, one killed and six injured, they obtained crisis therapy.

In the past seven years, Duncan's team has seized an average of 500 animals a year, and helped place them in good homes. Many offenders are discovered via complaints filed with the Department, leading to the closure, prosecution or fining of 60+ facilities a year. The majority of animals seized are taken by consent agreement, which waives the fine, but, more importantly, allows Duncan to immediately remove animals from a dangerous situation.


Several complaints were lodged against Berry for selling sick puppies in Kansas. He raised and sold the puppies directly to the

public from his home without a license. The federal government does not license breeders who sell animals directly to the public, but Kansas is one of the few states that does. Therefore, breeders like Berry are able to fly under the radar of state and federal officials, able to raise animals in filthy, inhumane conditions with little chance of getting caught.

Kansas desperately needs more employees to inspect the hundreds of licensed and unlicensed facilities in the state. The department can't afford to pay for overtime—instead staff members collect "comp" time, and as a result the office is increasingly empty. The fewer hours worked, the fewer facilities inspected. Yet, despite these limitations, Duncan and her team continue to track down hundreds of breeders who have fallen through the cracks of regulation.

Not long after the raid in October, all 37 dogs and the litter of cats rescued from Berry's property were successfully placed in adoptive homes. Berry pled no contest to six counts of animal cruelty and was sentenced to one year in jail and an \$18,000 fine. We are happy to report that one more bad player has been taken out of the game, thanks to Duncan and the Kansas Animal Health Department.

What You Can Do:

- 1) Adopt an animal from a shelter or rescue group,
- 2) If you live in Kansas, urge your state legislators to increase funding for Animal Health inspectors, and
- 3) No matter where you live, urge your members of the U.S. Congress to license and regulate breeders who sell directly to the public. 



Julia Janak is Director of Grassroots Advocacy for the Doris Day Animal League. She monitors and reports on state and federal legislation and manages the grassroots activity for the League.