Overview of Public Comments Submitted on Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship’s Proposed Changes to Strengthen Companion Animal Welfare Rules

The following are approximated summaries and counts of the most common feedback received in response to the Department’s call for public comments regarding changes to rules on animal welfare standards.

Some individuals submitted several comments, so counts may not be exact representations of unique commenters.

Some commenters expressed sentiments on several subjects in the same comment. “Count” reflects the approximate number of total times a sentiment was expressed across all comments.

Summary statistics

- 138 unique digital commenters provided feedback
- 74 form letter comments were submitted from EveryAction.com. See Last page for full text of this form letter.
- About 20 Kirkwood Community College students provided comment as a part of class requirements.

Daycare

- Doesn’t believe a primary enclosure for every daycare dog is economically feasible
  - Count: 4
- Supports increasing availability of water/food
  - Count: 10
- “One hour of water” is not scientific. More frequent 10 minute intervals would also work. Also concern that there is a language conflict with other rule 67.16(8) requiring water “often as necessary.”
  - Count: 2
- Food only given while animal is in primary enclosure takes away from training and group play
  - Count: 2
- Playgroups should be even-numbered and changed to 16 or more
  - Count: 3
- Supports 2 hour break rule, wants to expand it to “cage-free” facilities so that dogs can get a break from group environment and go into private cages for a while
  - Count: 1
- Supports letting cage-free boarding staff be somewhat hands off, but still nearby
- Language of 12 dogs per housing facility (sections j and e) conflicts with 1 dog per enclosure 67.8.1b
  - Count: 3

**Humidity and Temperature**

- Between 45 and 85 degree and 30-70% humidity rules are arbitrary and do not take into account breed differences
  - Count: 31
- Supports temp/humidity language
  - Count: 10

**Inspections**

- Agree with checkup inspections and cleaning regulations. Also would be supportive of more unannounced annual visits.
  - Count: 9
- If veterinary treatment is sought by a licensed facility, the treating vet should have to notify IDALS to provide red flag data about bad facilities and help inspectors determine hotspots of bad practice
  - Count: 4
- Instead of live postings of inspections, facilities need a 14-21 day appeal period before information goes public that could harm their businesses
  - Count: 3
- IDALS and USDA inspections should be conducted jointly
  - Count: 1

**License**

- Total facility size should be limited to prevent the emergence of puppy mills and costly large-scale rescue operations, which the counties are forced to pay for
  - Count: 2
- 4 breeding animals is not a business. Should be 5 or 6 minimum
  - Count: 2
- Too many inspections from IDALS considering USDA already performs some
  - Count: 6
- Rescues should not be able to hold dealers’ licenses, or if they do, they should be held to the same standards as breeders and follow the same rules. Ex: Rescues should need veterinary care agreement
  - Count: 6
- Does every referral to “dealer” now also apply to rescues? Could cause some rescues to stop doing their work
  - Count: 4
- Supports prompt veterinary care clause
  - Count: 10
    - Requirement does not allow flexibility for vet booking (Count: 1)
- Supports adding measures to make sure people formerly convicted of animal cruelty can’t obtain a license
  - Count: 8
- Paragraph 52 should say “intact” animals, as it is incongruent with later section
  - Count: 2
- In-home facility maximum of 6 adult animals is arbitrary and does not account for differences in animal size or increased/decreased burden of some breeds. Cleaning requirements also arduous on in-home breeders and hard to enforce or otherwise too vague to determine who is a hobby vs. commercial breeder
  - Count: 13
- Iowa Code section 162.20(5)b needs a state database to monitor waivers if it will be enforced fairly
  - Count: 1
- Create a hobby breeder license
  - Count: 3

Other vaccination/disease topics

- Some dogs have bad reactions to vaccines and shouldn’t be required to get vaccines that are best left at the discretion of the owner
  - Count: 11
- Supports stronger, proactive measures being added to prevent spread of diseases such as canine brucellosis (67.4(3)(i)).
  - Count: 9
- Parvo should read Parvo (dogs only) because it is only highly contagious in dogs
  - Count: 1

Personnel

- 1 staff per 15 dogs is too strict and arbitrary and no neighboring states have this. 20 or 25 is more appropriate.
  - Count: 3
- 15 dogs per staff member is appropriate almost always. Maybe a few groups of “lazy” dogs could be around 20, but this is hard to determine
  - Count: 2
- When transporting, taking dogs out for exercise every 6 hours is too burdensome on personnel. A simple check-up and feed/water every 6 hours is sufficient.
  - Count: 21
- Six hours is too long, and animals should be given an opportunity to move sooner  
  o Count: 3

- Don’t mandate a staff education curriculum  
  o Count: 1

**Rabies**

- Commercial facilities should not be exempt from rabies vaccination requirements  
  o Count: 4

**Solid Surface**

- Supports Ohio model of eliminating wire flooring and stacked enclosures altogether  
  o Count: 8

**Spacing and Physical Shelter Requirements**

- Concern over 75 ft per dog; too much undue hardship on some respectable, established facilities.  
  o Count: 5

- Include a definition of “stand erect” to mean “stand on all fours” to avoid confusion about how tall a kennel must be. No one expects kennels to accommodate a dog standing on its hind legs upright.  
  o Count: 1

- Supports improved shelter (wind blockage, no chains as primary enclosure, able to lie on its side). A majority also favored including “large enough for full leg extension” into the language.  
  o Count: 22

- Shelter cleaning when frigid outside will cause build-up of ice and be dangerous for dogs or is otherwise unnecessary when a “spot cleaning” may be sufficient. Chemicals beyond soap and water are also often unnecessary  
  o Count: 3

- Shelter size requirement is too large and impractical  
  o Count: 1

- 12 dogs or cats in the same primary enclosure is far too many  
  o Count: 2

- Chain of 3x body length is not long enough for any exercise to take place, which could lead to animal lung and muscle problems  
  o Count: 1

- Change from “free of rust” to “free of excessive rust”  
  o Count: 21
Titers

- Vaccine titers should be acceptable forms of verification, as many vets use them as an alternative to vaccination. Only documentation of core vaccines should be required
  - Count: 27

Miscellaneous

- Supports no new changes to any of the rules
  - Count: 1
- Supports all of the rule changes and measures to increase protections for companion animals
  - Count: 50
- Revise Chapter 717 to include Farm deer and poultry in addition to equine, bovine, ovine, porcine, ostriches, rheas, emus
  - Count: 1
- Disagrees with the “no fiscal impact” statement
  - Count: 1
- Due process questions related to removal procedure
  - Count: 1
- Need accounting requirements to ensure cost of care/impoundment are not exaggerated and passed on to breeder
  - Count: 1
- Request 6-9 month grace period to implement rules
  - Count: 1
- Removing dogs from cage to use power washer is not necessary to get them to avoid spray and would result in less cleaning
  - Count: 1
- Paragraph 47 only says dogs and cats, but sometimes other animals can be taken in by shelters
  - Count: 1
I support many of the proposed changes, including:

1. Requiring that, “Water for dogs and cats must be made available at minimum two times daily for at least one hour each time,” and clarifying requirements for receptacles for food and water

2. Barring the use of “doghouses with chains” as a primary enclosure for dogs

3. Requiring that shelter must provide “regress from exposure to wind” as well as the current “rain or snow”

4. Clarifying veterinary care requirements, including “prompt” veterinary care be provided, requiring all commercial establishments have a written agreement with a veterinarian and that this agreement (excluding commercial kennels and boarding kennels) includes a veterinarian visit “at least once every 12 months”

I also have concerns and suggestions:

1. While I appreciate the addition of requiring a “solid resting surface of adequate size for an animal to lay on its side” for facilities utilizing wire flooring, and requiring “a means to prevent urine, feces, and other debris from passing into or being discharged into the underlying primary enclosure” for facilities utilizing stacked enclosures, I am concerned about the welfare of animals kept on such flooring and within such enclosures for extended periods of time or the animals complete life span, as often happens within commercial breeding facilities. I encourage Iowa to follow the lead of Ohio, a state with a similar commercial dog breeding industry, and phase out the use of problematic wire flooring and stacked enclosures within commercial dog breeding facilities.

2. I understand that under current regulations and within these proposed changes, commercial establishments are not held to the same standard regarding vaccinations, and that commercial breeding facilities are often exempt from vaccinating for rabies. This is unacceptable, particularly regarding zoonotic diseases such as rabies. I encourage the Department to require vaccinations in a more consistent manner to protect the public from zoonotic disease and animals from infectious disease.

3. I understand that under the proposed changes, maximum number limitations will be determined by the Department for “dog day cares”, “in-home facilities”, and “foster care homes”, but not required for commercial breeding facilities. I encourage the Department to also implement such maximum number limitations within commercial breeding facilities based on the requirements stated under 67.3(1)(o), “based on, but not limited to, the number of available primary enclosures, the animal care space available within a facility, or the lack of available personnel to care for the animals.” Bad actors, or puppy mills, within the commercial breeding industry, such as White Fire Kennels, create an enormous logistical and monetary challenge for county officials when the number of animals exceed the facility’s ability to provide humane treatment and care, and animals need to be seized. Setting maximum number limitations would aid in the prevention of such large-scale, costly rescues.
While the proposed changes are a good first step, additional measures will also need to be implemented in order to effectively create an Iowa standard, across companion animal industries, that is more in-line with Iowa values. These include:

1. Proper screening of applicants to ensure a license isn’t issued to an individual who has previously been convicted of animal cruelty

2. Annual, unannounced inspections of all commercial dog breeding facilities by the Department, regardless of federal license status

3. Implementing proactive measures for addressing zoonotic diseases, specifically canine brucellosis and campylobacter as recent outbreaks have been traced back to commercial dog breeding facilities and pet store puppies