

Two Vietnamese puppy fattening farmers choose to exit dog meat trade

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More than 50 puppies have been rescued, after the farmers decided to exit the dog meat trade completely. Supplying puppies to the dog meat trade for so long had taken a toll on Phạm Dũng's mental health. He decided to reach out to the Humane Society International's (HSI) Models for Change program, which helps support and facilitate business owners in the dog meat trade who want to exit the industry.



Humane Society International workers remove dogs from a dog fattening facility in Vietnam, June 5th, 2024. Credit: Meredith Lee/HSI

More than 50 puppies destined to be slaughtered as part of the dog meat trade in Vietnam have been rescued after two separate puppy fattening farmers decided to close their businesses.

At puppy fattening farms, puppies are bought from local villages and fattened up for weeks until they reach slaughter weight. The fattened dogs are then sent to local dog meat restaurants and slaughterhouses.

Such farms are common in Vietnam's dog meat hotspots, such as the Thai Nguyen province where the two now-closed facilities were located.

One of the facilities belonged to fifty-two-year old Mr Phạm Dũng, who has been operating his puppy fattening farm for seven years.

But supplying puppies to the dog meat trade for so long had taken a toll on his mental health. He decided to reach out to the Humane Society International's (HSI) Models for Change program, which helps support and facilitate business owners in the dog meat trade who want to exit the industry.

Talks as part of the program were successful, with a remorseful Mr Dững allowing HSI to rescue the farm’s remaining puppies, and agreeing to transform the puppy fattening farm into a small cropholding.



Puppies in a cage at the dog fattening facility owned by Mr. Dững. Credit: Tim Gerard Barker/AP Images for HSI

“I’m looking forward to putting the dog meat trade behind me and growing crops instead”, Mr Dững told HSI. “Harvesting beansprouts and sweet potatoes will be a lot more peaceful than fattening puppies for slaughter, and a lot better for my mental health knowing I’m not causing any suffering. It’s also a healthier lifestyle with no links to rabies, so my family and I are happy about this.”

Another owner of a puppy fattening farm also in the Thai Nguyen province, recently joined HSI’s program too. Thirty-five-year old Mr Trần Lê Hậu had launched his business three years ago, but was growing increasingly worried about the risk of rabies through unvaccinated dogs, and decided to exit the industry.

“I no longer want to be involved in the dog meat trade,” Mr Lê Hậu told HSI. “I know about the dangers of rabies and other diseases, and I don’t want that for my family or my community.”

Health authorities including the World Health Organization have well-established the link between the spread of deadly rabies and the dog meat trade. In Vietnam, the dog meat trade is said to be undermining public and government initiatives to eliminate rabies, as it encourages a large and unregulated production and movement of puppies and dogs.

This threat of rabies has led local governments in the region to collaborate with HSI on the Models for Change program, which not only helps transition dog meat farms but also implements rabies vaccination programs as well as public awareness campaigns to discourage dog and cat meat consumption.

HSI says that the more than 50 puppies who were rescued from the two farms are now starting their journeys to find loving homes.



HSI workers load dogs onto the rescue truck. Credit: Meredith Lee/HSI

Vietnam's Dog Meat Trade

In Vietnam, figures estimate that five million dogs and one million cats are slaughtered each year for their meat.

According to HSI, most of the slaughtered dogs are stolen pets or strays snatched from the streets using poison bait, painful taser guns, pincers or ropes, or imported from surrounding countries such as Cambodia.

The sale and consumption of dog meat is not illegal in Vietnam, but there are punishable offenses for unregulated trans-provincial movement of dogs and pet thefts.

Despite there being no scientific evidence, some consumers believe that dog meat has medicinal properties and can increase male virility. Contrary to popular belief, dog meat is not an expensive delicacy, but costs around 150,000 - 200,00 VND (\$6 - \$8) per dish.

Positive Progress Against the Global Dog Meat Trade

An estimated 30 million dogs are killed for human consumption every year across Asia, according to Humane Society International. This includes around 10-20 million dogs that are slaughtered in China, 2 million in South Korea, 1 million in Indonesia, and around 5 million in Vietnam.

However, support for the trade is on the decline, and there is a growing animal protection movement across Asia that opposes the consumption of dog and cat meat.

This trend has been reflected in the growing number of government bans in recent years.



A timid puppy inside of its cage at the dog fattening facility owned by Mr. Dũng. Credit: Tim Gerard Barker/AP Images for HSI

In 2020, Shenzhen became the [first city in China](#) to ban the consumption of dog and cat meat, and the Indian state of Nagaland, infamous for its ‘hidden’ dog meat trade, also [announced a complete ban](#) along with heightened legal enforcement.

Campaigners also welcomed a “watershed” moment in the fight against the dog meat trade when the Indonesian capital city of Jakarta, South-East Asia’s biggest city, outlawed the dog and cat meat trade [last year](#).

Perhaps most notably, South Korea [recently announced](#) (November 2023) a historic bill to ban dog meat farms in the country.