



Animal Care

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Factsheet

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service APHIS 41-05-014

The Animal Welfare Act Prohibitions on Animal Fighting

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for enforcing the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). First enacted in 1966, the AWA is a Federal law intended to ensure the humane treatment of certain warm-blooded animals that are used for research, bred for commercial sale, exhibited to the public, or commercially transported. This law also includes provisions against animal fighting.

■ Animal Fighting: AWA Provisions and Penalties

The AWA provisions on animal fighting are found in Title 7, section 2156 of the *United States Code* (7 USC 2156). Specifically, the AWA prohibits individuals and businesses from knowingly sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in a fighting venture, such as dogfighting or cockfighting, and from knowingly selling, buying, possessing, transporting, training, delivering, or receiving an animal to participate in a fighting venture. The law also prohibits individuals and businesses from knowingly using the U.S. Postal Service or other interstate means for promoting or furthering an animal fight, and from knowingly buying, selling, delivering, or transporting in interstate or foreign commerce sharp instruments to be attached to a bird's leg for use in animal fighting. These AWA violations are punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000 and imprisonment for up to 5 years.

In addition, the AWA makes it illegal to attend an animal fight or to cause a child under the age of 16 to attend an animal fight. These AWA violations are punishable by imprisonment for up to 1 year and a fine of up to \$100,000 (attending an animal fight) and imprisonment for up to 3 years and a fine of up to \$250,000 (causing a minor to attend an animal fight), respectively.

■ Enforcement and OIG's Role

Animal fighting, such as cockfighting and dogfighting, is against Federal law. Animal fighting circles can be extremely dangerous, often including other illegal activities such as drugs, firearms, and gambling.

USDA Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) inspectors who observe evidence of animal fighting during routine inspections refer suspected cases to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), USDA's law enforcement arm.

OIG initiates investigations where appropriate and as resources permit. OIG also may refer complaints to other law enforcement agencies. OIG personnel work closely with Federal, State, and local law enforcement authorities on these cases. States have their own laws and enforcement mechanisms that prohibit animal fighting ventures.



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