

May 14, 2025

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Division of Animal Health
P.O. Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708-8911
Via Email: DATCPAnimalLicensing@wisconsin.gov

RE: ***Dog Seller and Dog Facility Operator Complaint - Requesting Investigation
into Ridglan Farms' Classification of Dogs***

To whom it may concern:

Rise for Animals and The Marty Project respectfully submit this formal complaint requesting that the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection ("DATCP") investigate Ridglan Farms ("Ridglan") for potential violations of Wisconsin's Dog Sellers and Facilities Law (Wis. Stat. § 173.41) and associated administrative code (Wis. Admin. Code ATPC 16). Specifically, we ask DATCP to investigate whether Ridglan has unlawfully misclassified dogs in its care and custody in order to evade humane care requirements.

On April 22, 2025, Ridglan's lead veterinarian, Dr. Richard Van Domelen, publicly declared before the Wisconsin Veterinary Examining Board that he considers *all* of Ridglan's dogs to be "research animals", regardless of whether any individual dog is enrolled in an active study. This sweeping claim not only presents significant federal concerns, but also raises the strong potential for violations of Wisconsin law within DATCP's jurisdiction.

Wisconsin law does not exempt dog breeders, sellers, or facility operators from oversight based on the intended end-use of dogs; rather, any entity that sells 25 or more dogs (from more than three litters) per year is required to hold a dog seller license and comply with the administrative and humane standards set forth in Wis. Admin. Code ATPC 16. The threshold is purely numerical and based on sales – i.e., there exists no exemption in Wisconsin's licensing statute for breeding dogs intended for research – and, accordingly, Ridglan is subject to Wisconsin's dog breeders, sellers, and facility operators licensing and humane requirements *even if* many of its dogs are "purpose-bred" for research.

Furthermore, for a research facility like Ridglan that uses federally-regulated animals, Wisconsin's animal cruelty laws limit the state's animal research exemption to *only* those animals being used in "research, or experimentation conducted pursuant to [an approved] protocol or procedure." Wis. Stat. Ch. 951.015(3). It follows that simply labeling dogs as

“research” animals does *not* relieve a facility of its legal obligations and may not be employed to avoid scrutiny and evade regulatory oversight.

Wisconsin’s regulatory framework emphasizes transparency, accurate record-keeping, and full cooperation with DATCP inspections. If Ridgland is maintaining dogs under improper classifications or failing to comply with mandated standards of care, Ridgland is breaching its legal obligations. Moreover, any intentional misrepresentation of its dogs as “research” animals to avoid legal obligations would appear to constitute unlawful interference with the performance of DATCP’s duties. See Wis. Admin. Code ATCP 16.28.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that DATCP:

- Conduct a full audit of Ridgland Farms’ DATCP license records and determine whether all dogs at the facility have been properly documented and reported in accordance with applicable law;
- Investigate whether Ridgland is undermining Wisconsin’s animal protection framework by reporting dogs to the USDA as Class A animals while simultaneously claiming to DATCP that they are “research” animals; and
- Pursue enforcement actions for any violations of Wis. Stat. § 173.41 or Wis. Admin. Code ATCP 16, including license suspension, civil penalties, or referral for criminal investigation under Wis. Stat. Ch. 951.

DATCP holds both the authority and the duty to ensure that state licensees operate transparently, within the bounds of the law, and with full accountability. We urge DATCP to take swift and decisive action in response to this matter.

For the animals,



Ed Butler, Executive Director
Rise for Animals
ed@riseforanimals.org



Amy Van Aartsen, Board Chair
The Marty Project
amy@themartyproject.org