



Rat Assistance & Teaching Society  
857 Lindo Lane  
Chico, CA 95973  
(530) 899-0605

[www.petrats.org](http://www.petrats.org)  
[rats@petrats.org](mailto:rats@petrats.org)

June 27, 2013

James M. Myers  
PETCO Animal Supplies, Inc.  
9125 Rehco Road  
San Diego, CA 92121

Dear Mr. Myers:

Our organization is starting a nationwide campaign asking pet shops to sell live rodents only as pets, and frozen rodents as reptile food. We are doing this for two reasons: 1. Feeding live animals to reptiles is inhumane, and 2. Selling live rodents for reptile food devalues their lives. We invite PETCO, as an industry leader, to join us in this evolution of the pet industry.

Referring to the PETCO philosophy that “Animals Always Come First,” and the PETCO Code of Ethics, which says “It is PETCO’s belief that all animals have intrinsic value...” and “As Petco associates, it is our responsibility to promote the health, well-being and humane treatment of animals,” and “Petco maintains its reputation as a pet-loving company by providing guidance to our customers that is in the best interest of the animals,” and “We believe that the mission of quality animal care is a never-ending process and we are dedicated to continually advancing industry standards in collaboration with experts in the field,” we think the PETCO ethical position uniquely qualifies you to help guide the pet industry into the future.

Feeding a live rodent to a snake is inhumane. Letting a snake strangle a rodent to death causes the rodent to suffer needlessly. Zookeeper Louis Daddono, owner of Serpent Safari in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, who was attacked, constricted and almost killed by a 22-foot python in 1997, said on the 2007 BBC/Animal Planet show *The Big Squeeze*, “At one point I really felt like my eyes were going to rupture out of my head...It really felt like being crushed...like a car was on top of my chest [and] body, and suffocating or drowning at the same time. The pain was incredible.” Daddono’s heart stopped and a fellow zookeeper performed CPR to keep him alive.

Some people try to argue that constriction doesn’t hurt a rodent in the same way because “their skeleton is collapsible,” but this is nonsense. First, their skeletons are no more collapsible than ours, and extensive scientific research shows that rodents suffer pain the same way humans do. Some people say that selling live rodents for snake food is okay because snake owners can kill or stun the rodent before putting it with the snake, but this risks causing additional suffering to the rodent. Most people do not know how to painlessly stun or kill a rodent. Not only would this violate many state laws regarding euthanasia, but also the PETCO Code of Ethics which states that only a veterinarian can euthanize animals other than fish.

The main argument in favor of selling live rodents for snake food is that snakes must have live prey to eat, but this is a fallacy. Almost all captive-born snakes are raised on thawed frozen rodents, and all wild-caught snake species commonly sold in pet shops can be trained to eat thawed frozen rodents. Frozen rodents are also safer for the snakes, since live rodents can cause serious injuries to snakes. Zoos and

professional herpetologists, who must care for many different species of snakes, feed their reptiles almost exclusively on thawed frozen rodents.

Rodents sold frozen are humanely euthanized with CO<sub>2</sub> at the breeding facility, and then frozen. Not only does this prevent the rodents from suffering by being killed by a snake, or by slammed against a wall by a human, but it also prevents the stress and suffering that can occur when the rodents are transported from the breeding facility to pet stores. It isn't acceptable to sell live mammals as food for dogs or cats, and it shouldn't be acceptable to sell live mammals as food for reptiles.

Selling live rodents for reptile food devalues their lives. Because most rats and mice in pet stores are sold for snake food, they are seen as cheap, disposable products, not living creatures with feelings. Because most rats in pet shops are sold as snake food, even the ones sold for pets are not usually good quality pets. Most rats sold in pet shops have not been genetically selected for temperament or health, have been raised in tiny cages that don't allow for the development of clean bathroom habits or intelligence, and have not been adequately socialized. If live rats and mice are sold only for pets, then fewer will need to be sold, and more care and attention can be given to their genetics, housing and socialization.

Our research shows that 80% of independent pet shops already sell frozen rodents as reptile food, yet 92% still sell live rats or mice for reptile food. Likewise, PETCO stores sell frozen rodents, and yet also sell live rodents for reptile food.

Pet stores are under more and more public scrutiny with regard to the humane treatment of animals. Selling only frozen rodents as reptile food would help support the pet industry's claim that they truly care about animals. Selling live rodents as snake food is an industry tradition that must change. We ask PETCO to stop selling live rodents for reptile food, to educate snake owners that their pets do not need to eat live rodents, and to make this the new industry standard.

We look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you.

Ratfully yours,

Debbie Ducommun  
President