By Kendra Penny

Dear Hannah,

Why is it illegal to have Siberian hamsters as pets in the state of California?

Dear Reader,

Section 671.1, Title 14 of its California Code of Regulations makes it unlawful to take or possess any bird, mammal, fish, reptile or amphibian except as provided for by law or regulation. (Fish and Game Code 2000.2002).

In California, possessing any non-domesticated, non-native members of the Family Rodentia is illegal unless a permit has been issued by the Department of Fish and Game in agreement with the Department of Food and Agriculture. The purpose of these regulations is to protect native California wildlife and the agricultural industry from potentially dangerous or detrimental forms of introduced wildlife.

If a group of Siberian hamsters escaped into the California environment, it is likely they would survive, reproduce and increase in numbers. California natural resources authorities consider this hamster a threat to several endangered forms of the kangaroo rat as well as to other native rodents which may occupy similar habitat. As seed and plant feeders, these hamsters are also considered as a possible threat to specific aspects of the California agricultural industry.

Restriction of these and other rodents is based upon the experiences of other states and nations of the destruction caused by the introduction of non-native wildlife forms. If you are serious about acquiring Siberian hamsters as pets, please contact the Department of Fish and Game and inquire into obtaining appropriate permits. If you illegally keep these animals, they are subject to confiscation and you will be subject to penalty under California law.

[Send your hamster questions to Hannah Hamster, c/o Editor - address Page 1]