



Heifer International: Frequently Asked Questions

What is Heifer International?

Heifer International is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to working with communities to end hunger and poverty and to care for the earth. Heifer focuses on human development—using livestock as tools for a sustainable solution to hunger, using ecologically sound agricultural methods. Through its “projects,” Heifer International provides training in the care and propagation of as many as 30 kinds of food-and-income-producing animals—as well as seeds and trees—education, training and more. Heifer’s goal is to help recipients to help themselves toward self-sufficiency and to use that newfound stability to help others.

How many people are hungry across the globe?

Nearly 1 billion people are chronically hungry and 3 billion live in poverty.

How many projects does Heifer have?

In FY’ 08, Heifer had 869 active projects in 53 countries and 27 U.S. states.

Does Heifer help people in the United States?

Even first-world countries have pockets of extreme depression and poor quality of life. To address poverty in North America, Heifer has funded more than 225 projects in 37 states and several Canadian provinces since 1947. Another goal of Heifer is to educate Americans about world hunger and the role of livestock in sustainable development.

What is the financial breakdown between programs and administration?

77.5% of Heifer’s funds go towards programs, 22.5% to administration. The Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance lists organizations that give over 65% of their income to programs, Heifer exceeds that.

If I make a gift of a Heifer animal, does my financial contribution go directly towards the purchase of that specific animal, for example, a goat?

(short answer) Most gifts are considered symbolic meaning: your financial gift is usually allocated where it’s most needed.
(longer answer) To help the greatest number of families move toward self-reliance, Heifer does not use its limited resources to track gift animals from donation to distribution. Instead, your gift supports the entire Heifer mission. We use your gift where it can do the most good by combining it with the gifts of others to help transform entire communities. In FY ’08, Heifer assisted a more than 1 million families through gifts of animals, training and passing on the gift. Heifer also educated the general public about world hunger, poverty and the environment and promoted ways for each individual to make a difference.

How is Heifer regarded by outside sources, such as the media and organizations that provide recognition to charitable organizations?

Heifer International is widely regarded as a results-oriented, highly recommended charity. Heifer was presented with the \$1 million Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian prize in 2004. Heifer has been seen on “60 Minutes,” and the “Oprah Winfrey Show,” among other programs. In recent years, Money magazine featured Heifer in the “The Money Guide to Wise Giving,” and Forbes magazine included Heifer in their list of “Gold Star Charities.”

How does Heifer measure the success of its projects?

Among others, Heifer uses the following factors to measure the success of its programs: improved quality of life for families; number of families assisted; health and production of animals distributed; number of offspring passed on; the sense of dignity of recipients and communities; environmental enhancement; and program sustainability.

Why should an individual support Heifer instead of/as well as a direct food aid or food crops development program?

Food aid, shipments of grain and other foods, are necessary and recommended in emergencies, as these are certainly very valuable and essential. However, these kinds of donations support relief that is temporary. As a long-term solution, when families who are hungry receive assistance from Heifer International, they’re provided with an enduring answer to hunger, especially in areas where land is unsuitable for growing crops. The boost that a cow or other animal can give a family can be the first step toward self-sufficiency.

How are recipients chosen?

Heifer International funds small-scale projects that benefit struggling farmers. Heifer determines whether the assistance will supplement local group efforts, and if the program is feasible, sustainable and environmentally sound. Sponsoring groups must be reliable and have a solid plan for training, administration and “passing on the gift.”

How does “Passing on the Gift” work?

Passing on the Gift is part of Heifer’s 12-step “Cornerstones for Just and Sustainable Development” that is incorporated in all of our projects. In passing on the gift, recipient families agree to pass on one or more of their animal’s offspring, or the equivalent, to another family in need, thereby contributing to a chain of life that continues for years.

What exactly is a heifer?

A heifer is a young female cow that has not yet had a calf.

Where does Heifer get its animals?

Heifer’s first choice is to buy high-quality animals near the project area. This approach helps the local economy, saves transportation costs and assures that the animals are adapted to the local climate.

Can only one animal really help a family?

Yes. An average family in Tanzania, for example, earns less than \$200 a year—not enough to buy a cow. With Heifer’s assistance, however, a dairy farmer in that country can often make as much as \$700 a year in milk sales from a Heifer-donated cow alone, plus two quarts a day for the family to drink. Manure is used to fertilize cropland, and there is usually a new calf to keep or sell every 18 months.

Does Heifer decide which type of animal people use?

Heifer is committed to “participatory development,” meaning Heifer International responds to requests from community groups. While Heifer International staff may recommend animals best suited for the area, the local participants decide which type of animals to raise.

Are the animals used for meat?

Heifer is not about eating meat. It was founded in the late 30’s by a peacemaker who was handing out cups of milk to hungry children on both sides of the conflict in the Spanish Civil War. He realized that a cow and not a cup would provide the means for a family to help themselves and strengthen their whole community. In some cases, animals are eaten; however, to most farmers, an animal that helps produce a product that can be used to feed a family or to sell—such as goats’ milk—is worth much more alive than dead. It’s in the farmer’s best interest to keep the animal healthy and productive. Some animals, such as rabbits and hogs, are fed crop by-products and raised specifically for their meat or income from meat. Heifer provides training in livestock care and production systems that create a humane living environment.

Besides providing food, how does livestock help people?

Animals help people increase food crops by plowing, providing manure as fertilizer or alternative fuel through biogas, offering a food source that also can be sold—such as milk, cheese and eggs—and used for transporting goods to market. For many people, animals are a living bank account—insurance against inflation and hunger. Skins, wool, hides, feathers and wax are used to make clothes and other items for personal use or sale. Working with Heifer International, animals give people confidence in their abilities. Best of all, unlike relief efforts, animals produce and multiply.

Does Heifer consider environmental impact, erosion control and sustainability?

Yes. Worldwide, Heifer has supported the efforts of integrating soil conservation measures and agro-forestry through the intensive use of fodder trees and/or grasses or contour planting. Heifer’s core philosophy is that peace begins when the hungry are fed and that any system of development that neglects people’s essential needs is inherently unsustainable.

Can I visit a project/volunteer at a project?

Heifer is working to empower our project partners to become self-reliant. Therefore, we don’t offer volunteer opportunities directly with our project partners. Some of our local project partners run their own volunteer programs. Heifer offers visits to project partners through our Study Tour program. Visit www.heifer.org/studytours for a current list of upcoming trips.

What volunteer opportunities are there with Heifer in Chicago?

Heifer-Chicago has a vibrant volunteer community. Volunteers educate, advocate and fundraise through presentations, booths at street fairs and festivals, events and more. Visit www.heiferchicago.org to learn about opportunities to get involved.