



10 Reasons to Say NO to Animal “Gifts”

www.awfw.org/no-animal-gifts

Introduction & Summary

During the holiday season, popular gifts include donations to programs that send live farm animals as “gifts” to help alleviate hunger and poverty in low-income countries.

Our purpose here is to make the criticisms of these campaigns public and to encourage alternatives that are more effective and more compassionate.

We examine the flaws in concept and practice with animal-gifting groups in general, and with Heifer International in particular (since they are the largest and most well-known).

In short, we explain why animal gifting doesn’t necessarily help, and sometimes harms, the recipients, and how these programs may be misleading to donors.

1. Most recipients are lactose intolerant and harmed by dairy...

Increased dairy production is frequently touted as one of the greatest successes of animal gifting programs. However, 75% of the world is lactose-intolerant, and 90% of Asian and African populations (toward whom dairy programs are aggressively targeted) are lactose intolerant.

Most mammals (including humans) become lactose intolerant after weaning. Mothers’ milk is very specifically created for infants, not adults.

As such, both small- and large-scale dairy programs can negatively affect the health, well-being, and productivity of people in lactose intolerant populations. Widespread digestive ills include stomach pain, gas, bloating, cramps, diarrhea, and even vomiting. Consuming milk from other animals is also associated with allergies, asthma, and a host of autoimmune disorders.

While dairy is “a” source of calories, the resources used to produce it may be better spent on alternatives that provide a higher quality and quantity of calories, protein and calcium.

2. More farmed animals does not mean less hunger...

Pro-meat biases mean that sustainable plant crops that actually provide better nutrition and more income are often overlooked. Teff, for example, is one of Ethiopia's oldest grains. It is drought and heat tolerant, while also being packed with protein and calcium. In *Food Choice and Sustainability* (2013), Dr. Richard Oppenlander writes:

“In Ethiopia, over 40 percent of the population is considered hungry or starving, yet the country has 50 million cattle (one of the largest herds in the world), as well as almost 50 million sheep and goats, and 35 million chickens, unnecessarily consuming the food, land and water.... [P]oorly managed cattle grazing has caused severe overgrazing, deforestation, and then subsequent erosion and eventual desertification. Much of their resource use must be focused on these cattle.

Instead of using their food, water, topsoil, and massive amounts of land and energy to raise livestock, Ethiopia, for instance, could grow teff, an ancient and quite nutritious grain grown in that country for the past 20,000 to 30,000 years. Teff...is high in protein, with an excellent amino acid profile, is high in fiber and calcium, (1 cup of teff provides more calcium than a cup of milk), and is a rich source of boron, copper, phosphorus, zinc, and iron.

3. More farmed animals mean more mouths to feed...

Many recipients of animal gifts struggle to provide basic care to the animals they receive. Animals do not magically produce milk and meat or just “live off the land” by grazing. They must be given food and water in areas where these resources are already scarce.

Having another mouth to feed can significantly add to a family's burden, and the animals frequently suffer from neglect, malnutrition, dehydration, lack of veterinary care, and lack of shelter from temperature extremes.

4. Farmed animals do not just “live off the land”...

While it's tempting to believe, farmed animals do not just “live off the land” consuming only grass and scraps that don't compete with human consumption.

In response to criticism that promoting animal agriculture in regions already plagued by desertification and drought is irresponsible, Heifer International and other animal gifting organizations now have “zero-grazing” requirements. Zero-grazing means that animals are confined and must have food and water brought to them. This food and water can be in direct competition with human consumption.

Zero-grazing is not only bad for the animals who are confined, it is also bad for the people (often children) who must use their time, labor and resources to feed and water the animals.

5. Farmed animals use a great deal of water...

Raising animals requires up to 10 times more water than growing crops for direct consumption. Yet, organizations such as Heifer International promote inherently water-intensive animal farming, even in areas identified as water-scarce. This means that already limited freshwater supplies are diverted to animals for their hydration, sanitation, and the cultivation of the forage used to feed them.

These uses of water are in direct competition with the drinking water needs of local communities, as well as with the supply of water available to grow foods for direct human consumption.

Additionally, in many arid communities, water is only available from a communal well or reservoir, in which case hydrating animals is a labor-intensive process for adults and children who must travel by foot and can only carry limited amounts at a time.

6. Experts disapprove of animal gifting...

The World Land Trust calls animal gifting programs “madness... environmentally unsound and economically disastrous.”

They conclude that “now that the grave consequences of introducing large numbers of goats and other domestic animals into fragile, arid environments is well documented, WLT considers it grossly irresponsible... to continue with these schemes ... as a means of raising quick money for charities over the Christmas season.”

Sean O’Neill of the *Times of London* explains that animal gifting organizations “are wooing the ethical shopper with pictures of cute goats wearing Christmas hats and promises of helping the poor in developing countries.” But organizations such as the World Land Trust and Animal Aid deem that “it is ‘madness’ to send goats, cows and chickens to areas where they will add to the problems of drought and desertification.”

7. Animal gifting programs mislead the public...

Heifer International and similar organizations spend exorbitant amounts of money on colorful, glossy catalogs depicting cute children hugging and kissing happy, healthy animals. From these catalogs, well-meaning donors choose which animal they would like to send as their gift-donation.

But in reality, donations may not go toward the purchase of the selected animal. Quoting from Heifer International, “monies from any... animal fund can be used where needed most.”

Vegetarians and vegans especially beware: bee and tree gift-donations can support any animal program, fundraising, or overhead.

8. Animal gifting organizations may have questionable spending...

Concerns about the priorities and appropriate use of donations apply to all animal gifting programs, but Heifer International raises particular concerns because of their annual budget, which exceeds \$250 million a year, and luxury spending such as on their headquarters.

Heifer International consistently spends more than a million dollars a year on professional fundraising fees. Those are just the “fees.” The figure jumps to more than \$20 million when printing, distribution, processing, and other fundraising-related costs are included.

According to Heifer International’s 2012 taxes, they spent \$20,328,394 on fundraising alone.

Former Indian minister for social welfare and animal protection, Maneka Gandhi, stated: “Nothing irritates me more than charities abroad that collect money and purport to give it to women or children or for animals in Asia or Africa. Very little reaches the country or the cause for which it is meant. Most of it goes toward their own ‘infrastructure,’ which means rent, staff, travel and ‘investigation’... This is cynical exploitation of animals and poor people.”

9. Some animal gifting programs raise concerns from charity raters...

GiveWell charity rating organization deemed in their evaluation of Heifer International that the organization lacked sufficient transparency and priority programming for a recommendation.

Quoted from the GiveWell website are concerns about animal gifting in general:

“We have not found a livestock-distribution charity that has published either evidence of impact... or clear answers to these questions:

- Are the livestock in good health? Will they meet recipients’ expectations, or will they die or underproduce, potentially causing people to make bad plans and investments?
- Do the recipients of livestock gifts have the ability, in terms of knowledge and resources, to take care of the livestock well?
- Are gifts successfully targeting those in need within a community? Is there a risk of fostering jealousy and/or economic instability?
- Might recipients benefit more from different valuable gifts, such as cash?”

10. There are better feeding & gift-donation programs...

Due to popular demand, we have created a special Plants-4-Hunger program to provide a compassionate and highly effective alternative to animal gifting: www.awfw.org/gifts.

We send 100% of your donation to four hand-picked groups with low overhead and proven successes in high need areas. These hunger relief projects provide both immediate assistance and long term community solutions that feed families without harming animals.