The Gift of Animals

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” —Chinese proverb

There are thousands of nonprofit groups in the world that aim to help those in need. While many of these groups give away money or services, one gives something rather unusual: farm animals.

Heifer International got its start with Dan West, a farmer from the Midwest. During the Spanish Civil War, Dan helped by giving milk to hungry children. Their sad state led him to an important insight: hungry people need to be able to get their own food. Giving them food a few times would not help.

Dan decided he would start a group that gave farm animals to people to raise. The people could use the animals both for food and for extra income. One heifer, or cow, for example, would provide milk to drink or sell.

Some of the animals given away so far include sheep, rabbits, pigs, camels, yaks, horses, goats, chickens, fish, and even honeybees. Heifer asks anyone who receives an animal to “pass on the gift.” They are asked to give away at least one of the animal’s babies to another family in need. In doing so, the number of families helped can expand more quickly. Heifer also trains people to care for their animals so they are not treated inhumanely.

So far, Heifer International has helped people in 128 countries. The group hopes someday to end poverty and hunger, one animal at a time.