



Consider Alternatives to Farm Animals as Gifts

Donating to an animal organization can be more beneficial than giving an animal as a gift this holiday season.

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Giving a farm animal as a gift during the holidays can be dangerous for the animal. Instead, consider buying your loved one a membership to an animal organization. Although giving a new goat or chicken to a family member to grow their hobby farm might seem like the perfect holiday gift, you should consider a different way to appeal to your loved one's inner animal lover.

Mississippi State University veterinary experts, who agree that animals generally do not make good gifts, suggest people can donate to an animal-health-care group in someone's name instead.

"Think how hard it is for people to say when they don't like or don't want a gift such as an item of clothing or an appliance," says Dr. Jennifer Burgess, who specializes in animal behavior at MSU. "Saying no is even harder when the gift is a living, breathing being. This often puts too much pressure on the recipient and can result in an unhappy animal, too."

Instead of giving a farm animal as a gift this year, consider these alternatives:

Contribute food, supplies or time to a local animal shelter and make this donation in honor or memory of a friend or family member.

Start a shelter-supply drive in the neighborhood and designate a friend or family member as the honorary chair of the effort.

Buy a certificate to spay or neuter if someone has acquired a new cat or dog.

Volunteer at an animal shelter with a friend or family member. Enjoy the time together caring for animals.

Join an animal rescue group and encourage a friend or family member to join at the same time.

Encourage a friend who wants a new farm animal to adopt one from a rescue organization.

Volunteer to farm-sit for a friend or family member on holiday vacation.

Make a donation to an animal group. Convey how the gift should be used.

Buy a friend's membership to an organization devoted to animal welfare and care. It's important to remember that farm animals are not toys or objects, and their well-being needs to be considered, especially during the holiday season.

"Giving a pet as a gift is risky," says Phil Bushby, a professor of Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare at the MSU College of Veterinary Medicine. "If the recipient doesn't want a pet or doesn't want the particular pet selected, the animal may end up being relinquished to a shelter."

Bringing a new animal to the farm during the holidays is especially stressful for the animal. A surprised owner has no time to prepare a place for it. Plus, many families spend the holiday season entertaining, cooking and shopping. Those activities often mean less time to spend attending to the needs of the animal.

Animals that are already part of the farm can be stressed when a new animal is introduced to the herd or flock. While the transition can be easy for some animals if done properly, others might not be compatible with the new addition. There is risk of injury or harm to the animals when this situation occurs.

Selecting an animal for the farm is a highly personal decision. The owner and the farm animal must get along for the arrangement to work. This can be accomplished only when the recipient is actively involved in the decision to get a farm animal and the selection of a particular breed, Bushby says.