

Empowering smallholder farmers is the key to sustainable livestock, says Heifer International

In Honduras, 90,000 farmers are improving animal health, breeding and grazing by adopting regenerative practices with Heifer's support

ROME, ITALY, September 29, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Supporting smallholder farmers to adopt regenerative and climate-friendly livestock practices can boost the sector's sustainability, says Heifer International, which has supported tens of millions of farmers across the globe to date.

This comes as farmers and global development experts prepare to gather for the second [FAO Global Conference on Sustainable Livestock](#) in Rome, Italy. Globally, nearly 600 million smallholder households rely directly on livestock for food and income, the majority of whom live in emerging and developing economies, yet the sector receives just [2.5 per cent](#) of total agricultural official development assistance.

These smallholder farmers face mounting risks, impacted by a 'perfect storm' of climate shocks — extreme heat, droughts, floods and rising temperature variability — that endanger their livestock and livelihoods.

Ahead of the FAO conference from September 29 to October 1, Heifer International spotlighted the need to put decision-making power and practical tools in the hands of smallholder farmers. Farmer buy-in from the outset and throughout, Heifer states, is essential to ensuring that livestock interventions are both climate-resilient and economically viable and, that they deliver lasting goals.

In Honduras, for example, Heifer's [Sustainable Livestock Signature Program](#) has trained farmers in improved pasture management, natural regeneration of native species, and the planting of live fences. As a result, participating farms have cut their carbon footprints by more than one third, while more than 2,250 hectares of degraded land have been reforested and biodigesters installed to generate renewable energy.

"It is inspiring to see how widely sustainable livestock practices are now being adopted in Honduras," said Carlos Tabora, Heifer livestock supervisor in Olancho Department, Honduras. "More than 4,200 farmers are following the lead of demonstration farms, putting environmentally friendly practices into action. These changes are making production more

efficient and having a direct positive impact on household incomes.”

Heifer’s approach in Honduras integrates animal health and well-being, climate and environmental care, social inclusion and economic viability. In partnership with local governments, donors and businesses, Heifer has cultivated an ecosystem of interventions that improves animal health, regenerate soils and strengthens rural communities through better market access.

As part of the program, 480 community para-veterinary technicians have been trained — 95 percent of whom are young people and 26 percent women. These trainees now play a vital role in their communities, delivering new animal health, nutrition and artificial insemination services in rural areas. By 2030, the project aims to reach more than 140,000 families across the country.

“Providing food, income and healthy soils that support entire ecosystems, livestock are central to sustainable development,” said Dilip Bhandari, Senior Director of Programs – Livestock Technology and One Health at Heifer International. “But empowering farmers with the knowledge and resources they need to care for their animals well is where the real gains are realized. When herds are healthy and managed regeneratively, productivity increases, emissions fall and communities thrive.”

As governments and donors meet in Rome to chart pathways toward climate and food-security targets, Heifer is emphasizing the need for greater investment in locally led livestock systems that put proven solutions in farmers’ hands.

Convened by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Global Conference on Sustainable Livestock brings together governments, scientists, farmers and agribusiness leaders to chart how livestock systems can feed a growing population while cutting emissions, restoring ecosystems and supporting rural economies.

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