

Got Mice?

A new program called Barn Cat Buddies is saving feral cats that would otherwise be euthanized in pounds and shelters. Placing the animals at horse farms and other barn-type settings experiencing rodent problems is creating a win-win for all concerned.

Diane Novak, program originator, started a similar program when she lived in upstate New York where horse and dairy farms were abundant. She had no idea how important the program would be here until she spoke with fellow cat lover Tammy Javier who created Barn Cat Babies when Javier worked with the Franklin County Humane Society/Planned Pethood Clinic.

Novak kicked the name around a bit changing it to Barn Cat Buddies; then used taglines like "Will Mouse in Exchange for Room and Board" and "Got Mice" which got people's attention.

"At first I begged people with farms to take ferals I knew would be euthanized. I hung flyers up and was relentless. I'm sure there were more than a few folks who ran when they saw my number come up on caller ID", she chuckled. But now people are calling her for cats and talking about how well the program is working.

"Relocation isn't as simple dropping off of cats at a farm. There is a barn cat protocol which includes crating the cats in a secure environment for a minimum of three weeks. They are fed, watered and litter boxes are changed during this time so they get used to living in their new surroundings. Farms must be willing to comply with the protocol or it won't work", Novak says.

"I spend lots of time with people on the phone because I want this to work for them and the cats". Farms must fill out an adoption form, and sign a release form freeing Novak from responsibility once the cats are transferred to their facility. "I do follow up calls to see how the animals are doing and answer questions if there are any. That's when the social worker in me comes out!"

The downside to relocation is that animals are unpredictable and may take off after the crating period. Most don't and some who leave do come back since they know there is a feeding source at the farm, but it can happen. "But if they do take off at least they won't be coming back with a litter", she says.

Since Novak started putting flyers out an interesting phenomenon has occurred; feral cat caretakers are contacting her for help in placing ferals they feel are in danger. And occasionally she gets a call to help place a friendly cat that has litter box issues or has shown up at someone's door.

"I'm always scampering for barns and matching up people's needs with specific cats. I go online to research stables in the area, make cold calls, beg for free ad space and sometimes make a total nuisance of myself", she chuckled.
"If you stand still too long you might find a flyer taped to your back!"

But all this good work comes with a price tag. Although Novak is a volunteer, she still must come up with the money to pay for sterilizations and vaccinations.
"The veterinary clinics still have to pay their mortgage, staff and bills just like any other business wanting to keep their doors open".

Since the program has grown in popularity she's had to ask farms to help with vetting costs. The good thing is that a clinic like [Angels of Assisi](#) in Roanoke is a 501C 3 organization so fixing the cats winds up being a tax deductible donation.

She adds Angels of Assisi holds once a month free feral cat clinics which she describes as "incredible" but Novak has not been able to take advantage of the clinics yet since the cats she comes in contact with need to move out of situations quickly.

"These little animals do a service in the community. They keep rodent populations down; live peacefully amongst their human neighbors, and only require a good meal and a place to bed down at night in exchange for working. It's a win-win for everyone."

"Each feral born was created by irresponsible pet owners who felt it was okay to dump or leave behind a breeding female. Once this cat has a litter, the process continues with her offspring creating a wild colony of cats. Since female cats can become pregnant as early as 5 months old, and have a gestation period of 63 days it's no wonder communities are seeing an over-abundance of cat births. Statistics show that one un-spayed female and all her offspring have the *potential* of creating 420,000 cats in just seven years"

"People who love animals tell me they'd open up a sanctuary if they ever won the lottery. Not me, I'd have low cost clinics and mobile vans tooling around the area sterilizing as many cats and dogs as possible. I hope for the day where the number of animals in any shelter was proportionate to the number of people looking for pets. Then there would be no need for sanctuaries!"

Diane Novak

Donations are gratefully accepted.

Checks can be written to Angels of Assisi with [Barn Cat Buddies](#) in the memo section and kindly mailed to:
Barn Cat Buddies Program
C/o Diane Novak
207 Shedd Lane Hardy, VA 24101