



Transfarmation®

Repurposing Pasture for Donkey Rescue

GRANT REPORT

Reporting Period: November 2022–November 2023

Amount Granted: \$15,000

Farm Location: Cookville, Texas

Former Farm Type: Broiler

Farming Method Tested: Establishment of animal rescue

Recommended for Other Farmers? In some cases

Biggest Learning: Rescue operations can make sense from a business perspective for farms with large amounts of grazing land or farms that incorporate agritourism into their business plans.

A Bo Halley Research and Innovation Grant totaling \$15,000 was awarded to Let Love Live for the Halley Farm project to repurpose pasture for donkey rescue. Halley Farm operated as a poultry farm and cattle ranch for over 40 years. This project involves partnering with **Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue** to house rescue donkeys on former grazing land for rehabilitation and socialization before Peaceful Valley finds permanent homes for them. Evan Penhasi represented **Let Love Live** for this project.





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Aerial view of Halley Farm, showing their 12 poultry barns surrounded by fields and forest

In the first six months of the pilot project, the Halleys prepared the rehabilitation space, completing the stages outlined in the table below, and welcomed the donkeys to their rescue. The remaining six months of the project were their “**maintenance**” phase, settling **into a rhythm** of caring for the donkeys.

Table 1. Project stages and time required

Stage	Time
Fixing fences	3 weeks
Replacing cattle panels for their pen	2 days
Baling and setting out hay during winter	4 days
Adding donkeys to the herd (98 total)	5 hours
Cutting hay for winter	15 hours



Project-Related Tasks

In the first quarter, daily tasks included checking on the donkeys, assessing their well-being, and working with them to get them used to people so they could be adoptable; checking fence lines; and making sure hay was fresh and accessible. In the second quarter, summer daily tasks were checking on the donkeys, feeding them to get them used to people, and checking fence lines and repairing as needed. They also had to pen the donkeys to check their hooves and overall condition and get them wormed and vaccinated. In the third quarter, daily tasks included monitoring the herd, and weekly tasks included feeding, checking fences, doing head counts, and communicating with Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue. In the fourth quarter, every couple of days they hand-fed the donkeys to help socialize them and ensured their ponds—the donkeys' water source—weren't frozen. Weekly tasks involved taking head counts and checking on the donkeys' overall condition. Monthly, they drove along the fence lines enclosing the donkeys to make sure they were up. Semiannually, they assisted Peaceful Valley in penning, providing veterinary care for, and shaving the hooves of the herd.

Unexpected Challenges and Lessons Learned

In the first quarter, the transitions were easier than expected. The time to get the land ready was as expected. And there were no unexpected challenges. Evan noted that everything was straightforward and anybody experienced with farmed animals shouldn't run into any issues. In the third quarter, they received over 50 donkeys from a farm in Louisiana, where a drought had depleted the grass in the fields, so the donkeys had nothing to eat. Evan said they would need to be careful and keep hay on hand for potential summer drought.

Employment

In the third quarter, Evan reported they had one full-time worker making \$480 a week and two part-time workers making \$100 each week. In the fourth quarter, Evan reported dedicating about 10 hours a week to upkeep related to the donkeys. He estimated spending about 2.5 hours a week on the project. They employed one full-time worker at \$300 a week and one part-time worker at \$40 a week.

Was the funding sufficient for the project?

Yes, \$11,000 was spent in the first six months, and remaining funds were spent on essential labor performed throughout the project.



Table 4. Proposed and actual budgets

Proposed budget		Actual budget	
Fencing material	\$2,500	Fence supplies and specialized labor	\$9,000
Panels for pens and gates	\$10,000	Project labor	\$6,350
Contracted labor	\$2,500		
Total	\$15,000	Total	\$15,350

What would the farmer have done differently?

Nothing. They started out with 50 donkeys to make sure they could handle everything and meet the animals' needs. Now that they have this experience, they are considering opening up 200 more acres of their property to welcome 100 more donkeys.

Time Frame

Evan stated that everything went as planned.



A group of donkeys grazing in the pasture



Socializing a herd of donkeys with treats

Farmer Achievements

Evan reported: **"The donkeys have actually elevated the mood on the ranch and rescue. Watching them flourish on land previously used to raise cattle for slaughter is a great achievement."** In their second quarter, he reported that they were in a position to rescue over 100 donkeys. In their third quarter, Evan noted that their achievements were penning all the donkeys and working with Peaceful Valley to help get the donkeys' hooves shaved and the animals vaccinated. At the conclusion of the fourth quarter, Evan said their achievements from this project were rescuing 99 donkeys and finding a way to use the land for financial gain without having to run cattle.

The Halleys previously ran cattle on the land where the donkeys now reside. Evan estimates that rescuing donkeys pays more per head (for their operation in Texas) than leasing land to run cattle (see the table below). Donkeys eat less and require half as much space. Also, as caretakers, the Halleys were financially responsible for hay and donkey cubes, water, fence lines, and pens. Peaceful Valley covers delivering, retrieving, and veterinary care for the donkeys, unlike running cattle, where the financial responsibility falls to the person running the cattle.

Table 3. Economic comparison of raising cattle and donkeys

	Cattle	Donkeys
Acres needed per 100 animals	200	100
Income per animal	\$400–\$500 per animal sold (Steers are sold at 8–9 months of age. Females are kept, along with 2–3 males. An operation with 150 heifers may end up with 75–80 calves. Of those, 60 would likely be sold.)	\$15/month paid by Peaceful Valley
Income per month	N/A	\$1,500 (for 100 donkeys)
Income per year	\$24,000–\$30,000 (for 60 animals)	\$18,000 (for 100 donkeys)
Expenses		
Feed and water	Owner’s expense	Owner’s expense The Halleys grow their own hay and use their ponds as a water source. Supplemental hay is about \$1,000.
Veterinary care and transportation	Owner’s expense	Covered by Peaceful Valley
Property taxes on agricultural land (in Texas)	~\$400 (800–1,000 acres)	~\$400 (800–1,000 acres)
Net income	\$24,000 to \$30,000 before the cost of feed, water, veterinary care, transportation, and taxes	~\$16,600 after all expenses

