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## **Poland**

**Post:** Warsaw

### **U.S.-Polish NGO Heifer International Gift Highlights Food Security**

**Report Categories:**

Food Security

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**Report Highlights:**

Lithuanian farmers received 102 pedigree sheep from Polish breeders who benefitted years ago with gifts of sheep from the Heifer International Poland Project. Lithuanian farmers will also receive training in animal breeding, nutrition, and business. The passing the gift ceremony was organized on December 11, 2009 in Laizdai, Lithuania, by the Heifer International Baltic Foundation and Heifer International Poland. The ceremony was attended by Lithuanian Minister of Agriculture who, apart from his gratitude to Polish farmers expressed his interest in furthering development of cooperation with the United States in the area of new technologies in genetic improvement of dairy cattle.

**General Information:**

With the help of Arkansas-based NGO, Heifer International, Polish farmers moved to assist poor rural families in Lithuania with the transfer of a flock of 102 sheep on Friday, December 11, 2009. Polish

farmers benefitted years ago with gifts of sheep from the Heifer Project, and as a requirement of that grant, now “pass on the gift” by giving away some of the offspring to others. This idea was born from the work of Heifer Project founder Dan West, who, in 1944, started the international NGO. As a farmer West realized that the way to beat rural poverty was to ensure that families had access to high quality farm animals, enabling them to earn their way towards food and financial security.

A delegation including Dr. Piotr Rucinski, FAS Warsaw’s Senior Agricultural Specialist, and Heifer Project Poland Country Director, Markus Tornberg, attended a ceremony on the Polish-Lithuanian border to “pass the gift.” Farmers received pedigree animals with proper documented health and safety certificates. They will also receive training in animal breeding, nutrition, and business. Poland and Lithuania still have undernourished and poor rural families. Grants of farm animals give the destitute hope for the future. Farm animals that earn money for a family will give the rural poor a doorway to food security and independence.

The ceremony of passing the gift was organized in Laizdai, Lithuania, by the Heifer International Baltic Foundation and Heifer International Poland. It was combined with a conference on the topic, “Impact of Small Business on Rural Development”. The ceremony was attended by Kazys Starkevicius, Lithuanian Minister of Agriculture, and Arturas Margelis, Mayor of Laizdai. On behalf of the recipients of sheep, Minister Starkevicius expressed his gratitude for the gift and emphasized the importance of cooperation between Lithuanian and Polish farmers. He also expressed an interest in future cooperation with the US in the area of animal production, especially new technologies in genetic improvement of dairy cattle.

The movement by Polish farmers to begin to help their neighbors highlights how Heifer’s programs in Central Europe are ready to move across borders in this region. The American Embassy Office of Agricultural Affairs in Warsaw has supported Heifer activities for decades. Recently, the Embassy awarded Professor Henryk Jasiorowski, who introduced Heifer Intl to Poland, with a lifetime achievement award in 2008. Embassy personnel are active in promoting Heifer International’s food security programs, such as its “Read to Feed” series of classroom lessons for youth and in its efforts to raise awareness about the importance of preserving biodiversity, and trying to focus greater attention on the need for governments and society to promote food security issues. Heifer International is active in more than fifty countries worldwide and has its headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas.

**Author Defined:**



“Pass on the gift” – from left to right: Arturas Margelis, Mayor of Laizdai, Kazys Starkevicius, Lithuanian Minister of Agriculture, Markus Tornberg, Project Poland Country Director, Dr. Arunas Switojus, Regional Director Baltic Foundation, Heifer International



Discussion during the conference – from left to right: Dr. Piotr Rucinski, FASWarsaw’s Senior Agricultural Specialist, Starkevicius, Lithuanian Minister of Agriculture, Arturas Margelis, Mayor of Laizdai.