HOW TO START, OPERATE, AND DEVELOP A FARM ANIMAL SANCTUARY
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ESTABLISHING A SANCTUARY

- Choosing Your Site ................................................................. 1
  - Your Big-Picture Plan ......................................................... 1
  - Zoning ........................................................................... 1
  - Physical Features ............................................................. 1
- Sanctuary Registration & Incorporation ................................... 3
  - Public vs. Private ............................................................. 3
  - State Nonprofit Incorporation ............................................ 3
  - Federal Nonprofit Status ................................................... 4
- Choosing the Board of Directors .......................................... 4
- Nonprofit Management Resources ....................................... 5
- Other Resources .................................................................... 5

## OPERATING A SANCTUARY

- Animal Care and Shelter Operations ..................................... 6
  - Feeding and Watering ......................................................... 6
  - Medical and Health Care .................................................. 6
  - Housing .......................................................................... 7
  - Incoming Animals ............................................................ 8
  - Outgoing Animals ............................................................ 9
  - Record Keeping ............................................................... 10
- Shelter Regulations .............................................................. 11
  - Licenses and Permits ......................................................... 11
  - State Veterinary Requirements ......................................... 12
- Sanctuary Administrative Procedures .................................. 12
  - Administration and Accounting ......................................... 12
  - Office Technology ........................................................... 12
  - Technology Resources ..................................................... 13
  - Operating Budget ............................................................ 13
  - Volunteers .................................................................... 14
  - Staff ............................................................................. 14
  - Insurance ...................................................................... 14
DEVELOPING A SANCTUARY

Fundraising .................................................................................................................. 15
  Direct Mail .................................................................................................................. 15
  Acquisition Mailings ................................................................................................. 15
  In-house Mailings ..................................................................................................... 15
Membership Enhancement ............................................................................................ 16
  Renewal Notices ....................................................................................................... 16
  Donor Calls and Visits .............................................................................................. 16
  Donor Recognition .................................................................................................. 16
Other Fundraising Efforts ............................................................................................ 16
  Online Fundraising ................................................................................................ 16
  Fundraising Events ................................................................................................ 17
  Donations-in-kind ................................................................................................... 17
  Grants ....................................................................................................................... 17
  Bequests ................................................................................................................ 17
Outreach and Visitor Programs ..................................................................................... 18
  Special Events and Conferences ............................................................................. 18
  Visitor Programs .................................................................................................... 18
Communicating with Members and the Public .............................................................. 18
  Brochures ................................................................................................................ 18
  Website ................................................................................................................... 19
  E-communications ................................................................................................. 19
  Social Media .......................................................................................................... 20
  Print Newsletters .................................................................................................. 20
Media Relations ........................................................................................................ 20
  Events Listings ...................................................................................................... 20
  Press Releases ...................................................................................................... 21
  Pro Tip #1 ............................................................................................................. 21
  Pro Tip #2 ............................................................................................................. 21
HOW TO START, OPERATE, AND DEVELOP A FARM ANIMAL SANCTUARY

As anyone who has established or run a farm animal sanctuary knows, this undertaking requires not only drive and compassion but also a great deal of time, money, and skill. It may seem daunting at the outset, but there are many resources to help you research, prepare, and get started.

This guide was designed to be a handy overview and reference tool. To thoroughly prepare yourself to run a sanctuary, however, there is no better way than putting in time at an established one. Volunteering or even working for a year or two at a shelter will be more helpful than any book or class. Farm Sanctuary offers internships in animal care, as well as development, education, communications, and administration. To learn more about Farm Sanctuary internships, please visit farmsanctuary.org.
ESTABLISHING A SANCTUARY

Choosing Your Site

Selecting a site for your sanctuary can be more difficult than you might think. You must consider, among other factors, zoning, public access, and the availability of resources and services.

Your Big-Picture Plan

Before choosing a site, know your plan. What is the overall strategy of your organization? Are you focusing on education, or is rescue the most important aspect of your work?

A site close to an urban area can enable extensive education and outreach, but higher property and operating costs, as well as zoning restrictions, may limit the number of animals you can shelter. The farther from farming communities you are, the more expensive farm-related goods and services will be. Obtaining feed and bedding for a shelter in a non-farming area may cost more than double what it would in a farm-heavy region. Additionally, you must consider the direction that local officials plan to take with available land; you don’t want to end up needing to move your sanctuary to accommodate a strip mall.

With a rural site, your shelter will have access to cheaper feed, more acreage, and more extensive vet services for the species you will be sheltering, but it will be less accessible to the public.

Zoning

Before acquiring land, make sure it is appropriately zoned for the type and number of animals you plan to shelter. Some areas prohibit or restrict certain species. For instance, in many places, it is legal to keep hens but not roosters.

Zoning also pertains to structures. Have a plan for the buildings you think you will need — then seek an area zoned to allow more structures than that, in case you grow. To ensure you get the appropriate permits, decide how many barns you will have and whether there will be residential housing, an education center, guest facilities, and/or parking areas. Again, the closer you are to an urban area, the more difficult it is to get operating and building permits. You should also find out whether the burial of animals is allowed on the property. If you can’t bury onsite, you will have to pay for rendering or cremation, the latter of which can be quite costly.

Physical Features

Water Supply. Make sure the property has wells that can handle the number of animals, residential houses, etc. you will need. Having a bad well or scant access to water can make the property worthless as a sanctuary. In the western United States, there are many drought areas that have limited ground water and water usage restrictions.

Type of Land. The land you choose must be appropriate for the type of animals you will be sheltering. For example, large animals, especially as they age, require flat land to live on. A site predominated by wooded
areas, rough terrain, or dangerous drop-offs could prove problematic.

If you plan to shelter many grazing animals, you will need either pasture land or the resources to feed them hay, which can be very expensive. If your property receives inadequate rainfall and is not set up to be irrigated, you will probably need to supplement grazing with hay anywhere from one to 12 months out of the year.

**Drainage is another important consideration.** If you are looking in an area that gets a great deal of rain, make sure that the property does not flood constantly. Also, when you are choosing building sites for barns, be careful to avoid areas that could flood, as well as sandy soils that might sink or heave. Find out as much as possible about a piece of land before committing.

**Animal Comfort and Safety.** Consider the needs and vulnerabilities of the species you plan to shelter, as well as the costs of accommodating them in adverse conditions. For example, Cornish or broiler chickens fare poorly in extreme heat, especially in humid climates. No place is perfect for all species, but you can make sure to have adequate shade, the ability to cool animals in the summer, and the ability to keep them warm in the winter.

Check what plants are growing on the property, as some are toxic to certain species. For instance, rhododendron is poisonous to goats. If you are unsure of what poisonous plants grow in your region, check with your local cooperative extension. You should also know what type of pasture is available. Even land planted by producers specifically for farm animals may be insufficiently safe, comfortable, and nourishing, since it need only sustain these animals until they are market-ready rather than keep them healthy over the course of long lives.

Also check with your cooperative extension to learn about predatory animals that could be a threat to your
residents. Many areas are heavily populated by coyotes, fox, bear, etc.; barns and fencing must be designed to keep out all predator species in your area.

**Veterinary Services.** One of the greatest challenges you will face is finding a veterinarian to treat your animals. In rural areas, you are likely to encounter veterinary practices that deal with sheep, goats, and cattle. Vets who treat pigs, waterfowl, turkeys, and chickens, however, are more difficult to find. Even vets who specialize in avian medicine may not be comfortable working with industrial birds. Horse vets will often work on other large animals, but they generally do not provide comprehensive services. As you care for your animals, you will sooner or later encounter the need for diagnostics, surgeries, and other procedures that require hospitalization. This may mean a long drive, which could be financially impractical and a detriment to your animals’ well-being. For these reasons, access to high-quality and appropriate veterinary services should be a priority in your search for a sanctuary location.

**Sanctuary Registration & Incorporation**

**Public vs. Private**

The primary factor in deciding whether to establish your sanctuary as a private organization or as public one is your anticipated source of funding. If you have a long-term, independent source of income (such as an income-generating trust fund), it may be more advantageous to keep your sanctuary private. You can still do animal rescue work, public education, etc., but without all the additional administrative and accounting work required of public sanctuaries like Farm Sanctuary. If, like most sanctuaries, you will depend on the public for financial resources, you will need to establish a “not-for-profit corporation” and begin the task of learning and complying with numerous state and federal rules and regulations.

**State Nonprofit Incorporation**

The first step towards establishing a public organization is to incorporate as a not-for-profit corporation in the state where your sanctuary will be located. Incorporation rules, such as the number of board members required, vary by state. Check online for the websites of your state’s government offices. Incorporation may be listed under the Department of Taxation & Finance, Office of Regulatory Assistance, or simply the Department of Corporations.

Once you have reached the appropriate state office or department, ask for the forms and instruction guides for establishing a nonprofit corporation. Most instruction booklets provide step-by-step instructions, sample completed forms, and sample bylaws and articles of incorporation. Think carefully about your purposes and goals, so you can establish the capacities you may need for future programs (such as the ability to have registered humane officers on staff, tax exemptions, etc.). The application will probably take six to eight weeks to process, although most states have online applications that take less time. Annual registration and filing fees are also required for state nonprofit corporations.

You may also want to research your state’s regulations regarding sales tax, as some states give nonprofit organizations an exemption. Though not required by law, professional legal assistance will be helpful during this process. Consider hiring an attorney to guide you through your initial application and/or ongoing reporting requirements.
Federal Nonprofit Status

After you have registered as a state not-for-profit corporation, you may find it useful to apply for federal nonprofit status under section 501(c)(3). The primary benefits include: 1) donor contributions are tax-deductible; 2) your organization is exempt from paying certain state and/or federal taxes; 3) foundations require 501(c)(3) status for grant awards; 4) lower bulk mailing rates are available; 5) 501(c)(3) status lends credibility to your organization. Generally, charities dependent on public funding will need to apply for tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status.

To obtain application forms and informational publications on registering as a 501(c)(3) organization, visit the IRS website. You can also write to the IRS Forms Distribution Center for your state (you can find the address at your local library, and many libraries have reference sets of IRS publications). Ask for Publication No. 557, “Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization.” You can expect your application to take a minimum of two months to process. As with state incorporation, it is not necessary to have a lawyer or CPA file the application, but you will find professional assistance very helpful.

Choosing the Board of Directors

All nonprofit corporations are required to have a board of directors, with the number of board members specified by the state of incorporation. The board is the first resource of any organization and is typically responsible for fundraising and development. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to find a group of individuals willing to assume these time-consuming and highly skilled responsibilities — and this is particularly true of newly formed nonprofit organizations.

In the beginning, it is likely that your board of directors will be comprised of the very people who are doing the
day-to-day, hands-on work of operating the sanctuary and building its programs. Although often necessary at first, this arrangement will eventually inhibit your sanctuary’s growth and development. Your goal is an independent board of directors whose primary responsibilities are to assess the overall effectiveness of the organization and to bring in financial resources.

## Nonprofit Management Resources

There are hundreds of nonprofit support organizations throughout the country that provide guidance, information, and resources for nonprofit management; you may have one in your own community. United Way, volunteer centers, university departments, community foundations, and many other organizations are great local or regional resources for startup nonprofit organizations. Professional guidance and help can also be worth the cost and save a lot of resources down the road — just be sure to carefully check references before engaging a consultant. Books and publications are another way to delve deeper into nonprofit management topics. Take the time now to read and learn as much as you can. Here are some resources to help you get started.

The Foundation Center’s Links
to Nonprofit Resources:
Foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/nonprofitlinks

Idelist's Resources for Nonprofit Organizations:
Idealist.org/info/Nonprofits (note the capital “N”)

Association of Nonprofit Professionals Marketplace and Bookstore
(for links to books, publications, a consultant directory, and more):
Afnet.org/marketplace

The Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) has a network of attorneys throughout the country who may be able to assist you with questions about nonprofit incorporation. Visit aldf.org for more information.

## Other Resources

You may find valuable information and free or low-cost resources from regional small business associations. Contact your local library or chamber of commerce to see if any associations exist in your community. Many established nonprofit organizations are also happy to assist and provide guidance. Develop as many relationships as you can with management-level staff and board members of nonprofit organization, and be proactive about seeking help. Organizations that provide evaluation services for donors such as the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, and Guidestar can provide their recommendations and guidelines for nonprofit organization structure and practices.
OPERATING A SANCTUARY

Animal Care and Shelter Operations

Feeding and Watering

Ensure that you are providing the best diet for your animal residents. Most commercial feeds are designed to promote rapid weight gain, which is detrimental to the animals’ health. Additionally, many farm animal species have been selectively bred to grow far too fast and too large. With good nutrition, however, the weight of even these animals can be maintained. Our species-specific care sheets have sections on proper feeds.

Access to fresh water at all times is essential. We recommend using automatic water units for large animals when appropriate. We use Nelson water units, which have thermostats to keep water from freezing in the winter. They are easy to clean and maintain. The initial investment, mostly the cost to install, is higher than for other options, but the savings in time and labor make them worth the money.

We have used auto water units for our birds but have much more difficulty keeping them clean and have not found appropriate ones for winter use at our New York Shelter. Because of that we use metal water fonts that can have a heater base put under them in the winter when temperatures are below freezing. All water units must be thoroughly cleaned daily and fresh water provided for all animals.

Ruminant animals must be provided with mineral supplements. Their needs vary according to the levels of ground minerals in each region. For example, both our Northern California and New York shelters have selenium-deficient soils, and so we are careful to provide ruminants at those locations with supplements that include adequate selenium. It is also imperative to know which minerals are toxic to your animals. More information on proper mineral supplementation is available in our species-specific care sheets.

Medical and Health Care

Take in only as many animals as you can easily monitor daily. Become familiar with each animal individually, so you are able to notice any changes in their behavior, appetite, or weight, as these changes can indicate health problems. Train all volunteers and staff members to watch for signs of lethargy, poor appetite, abnormal feces, or strange behavior, and make sure they are aware of signs specific to each species. For example, cattle and other ruminants often grind their teeth when they are in pain or are extremely anxious. Chickens who slow down or puff out their feathers, or whose combs become darker, lighter, or more flopped over, are showing signs of illness. Learning the many symptoms associated with each species will help you quickly diagnose problems and treat them before they worsen.

You should perform regular health checks on all shelters animals. Designate a day each week for checks, addressing a different group or species each time. Examine each individual of that population completely — trimming nails or hooves, checking eyes and teeth, looking for signs of loose feces on the body, and administering any necessary parasite treatments or vaccines. This type of health check allows you to catch problems before they become too serious and to provide basic care that keeps other problems from occurring.
One of the first things you must learn before caring for any species is proper restraint of the animal so that you can administer checks and health care without causing injury to the animal or yourself. Even with the smallest animals, improper handling can lead to serious injury or even death. Rabbits, for example, can damage or even break their spine if allowed to kick their back legs while being lifted. Large animals, like cattle, can panic and easily hurt someone if not properly restrained for medical treatments.

If you do discover an animal who is sick or not thriving, work with a veterinarian to diagnose the cause and identify treatment options. Once you have been working with the same species for years, you will learn the signs of many illnesses and be able to easily diagnose and treat them yourself. Until then, however, it is always best to consult with a specialist. Veterinary practices are essential for surgical procedures, lab work, and vaccines that require administration by a licensed veterinarian. It is more economical, however, to do basic health care such as antibiotic treatments, most vaccines, and parasite treatments yourself. Most medications, vaccines, and other veterinary supplies can be purchased through wholesale animal care and veterinary supply catalogs. Every species of farm animal has different medical needs. Many common ones are listed on our species-specific care sheets, but there are many more. Always keep up-to-date on diseases and medical care related to your animals. Because so few veterinarians work with industrial breeds, especially with elderly industrial animals, it is important build your own expertise.

**Housing**

Each species has its own particular environmental and housing requirements that should be researched prior to construction. If you are using existing structures, you may need to make adjustments. If you are planning on new construction, take advantage of the opportunity to build barns optimally suited to their future residents.
Always get estimates from several contractors and factor in all costs from the permits and foundation, including the electric and water lines. Many print, Internet, and other resources on designing farm animal housing are available. Check out your local cooperative extension, which may have blueprints and guides.

Also visit established sanctuaries; unlike most published sources on farm animal housing, shelter operators have experience dealing with older and special-needs animals, which will probably make up a large portion of your shelter population. Ask other shelter directors what they would change if they were rebuilding their own structures.

The particular needs of different species and even different breeds within species are covered in our species-specific care sheets as well as in our incoming animal procedures sheets. Proper housing protects animals from the elements, including freezing temperatures, snow, ice, rain, wind, and severe heat. Allow for good ventilation during all seasons because all animals are prone to respiratory diseases caused by such factors as mold and high ammonia levels.

All animals need access to an enclosed outdoor area; the size needed depends on the type of animal. Make sure that all structures and fencing they could encounter are free of sharp edges, wires, nails, etc.

Safe flooring is important for the prevention of injuries and discomfort. Flooring needs vary by species. For example, large animals such as cattle and pigs should not be on concrete flooring because it is hard on their joints. Like most animals, they also require flooring that will not become slippery when it is wet or soiled.

You should have an area or areas where incoming animals can be completely isolated from your resident population until they have been given a clean bill of health. Additionally, within each barn, you should have spaces where sick individuals or pairs can be separated from the group but still benefit from being near their herd mates. These areas will also help you introduce new animals to existing flocks or herds gradually.

Incoming Animals

Know your limits and stick to them. Never take in more animals than you are equipped to house, are able to see and treat for illness, and can afford. Even if you have plenty of barn space and pasture, you must also have enough staff to adequately care for each of the animals, as many will require special medical attention. One of the biggest pitfalls for shelters is taking in too many animals too soon. If you take in animals before obtaining funds, you will never find the time to raise the money necessary for their care. Always expect extra costs. Because most of the animals you take in will come from bad situations, you will probably be dealing with many health issues; this can deplete your budget quickly. We all want to save every animal, but doing so is not feasible; you will end up using all your time and resources providing inadequate care.

Follow proper biosecurity measures at all times. For the safety of the residents at your sanctuary, animals and humans alike, all incoming animals must be isolated, and strict disinfection and quarantine procedures must be followed. One of the most important housing spaces that you will need is an isolation area to keep new arrivals away from incumbent residents. A fence alone is an insufficient barrier because many diseases are airborne. All caregivers, visitors, and volunteers who come in contact with animals in isolation should follow a strict protocol, including an isolation suit, boots or boot covers, gloves or hand disinfectant, foot baths, and, if there is fear of airborne disease, masks. Train staff to wash their hands between visits with any new animals and your existing population. It is also a good idea to limit any non-staff from visiting new arrivals until you have had a chance
to assess any possible illnesses or behavior problems. A separate hospital and rehabilitation facility equipped with separate pens or stalls is the ideal option to care for new animals.

When rescued animals arrive, each should receive a full body check. Look for obvious health concerns such as external parasites, diarrhea, lethargy, pink eye (in the case of ruminant animals), and any symptoms pointing to other diseases or parasite infestations. Send a fecal sample from each animal to a licensed laboratory to determine which, if any, parasites they have; once you have the results, you can treat them accordingly. If you have reason to believe the animals are infected with any transmissible diseases, blood work or more extensive fecal exams can be done. Animals should remain in isolation for at least three to six weeks until they have a clean fecal result and are no longer showing any signs of illness. Investigate all symptoms and abnormalities before introducing animals to your resident populations.

When you are ready to introduce animals, it is a good idea to have a pen in the barn where they can see and sniff the other animals nearby without coming in full contact with them. This should last a week or so, depending on the species being introduced. Each species reacts differently when accepting a new member to their flock or herd. Once the animals are introduced in the same barn, they must be closely observed. Never leave new animals with your existing group until it is obvious that the group has welcomed its new member. For some species, this can be very time-consuming. See our species-specific care sheets for information on introducing new members to a group.

Keep accurate records of all incoming animal information, including photos of the animals. Record body-condition scores, both for the sake of shelter health records and for use in court if the animals have been confiscated. Before bringing an animal into your facility, make sure that you are meeting all state requirements, including blood work and proper health certificates. Bringing animals into your facilities illegally puts your organization, as well as your animals, at risk.

**Outgoing Animals**

Every sanctuary must develop a policy on animal release and/or adoption based on its own mission and goals. Adopters must have the resources and willingness to provide life-long and appropriate housing, food, and veterinary care. In the case of farm animals, those normally seen as food, we recommend adopting out only to vegan and vegetarian homes; if you do release animals to adopters who eat meat, take precautions such as contacting veterinary and personal references.
At Farm Sanctuary, we transport all our animals to their new homes, so we are able to see exactly where they are going, meet the adopters face-to-face, and evaluate the accommodations. If you plan to institute an adoption program, write to other sanctuaries, SPCAs, humane societies, etc. and ask for samples of their adoption applications, agreements, or contracts and information on their programs. Use these materials to help create a program that will fit your needs.

Additional considerations that must be made when instituting an adoption program include retaining legal custody of the animals and creating policies that allow animals to be returned to the sanctuary at any time if the placement does not work. Make sure that you will be able to follow up on adopted animals to be certain they are receiving proper care.

Over the course of sheltering, some of your animals will die or require euthanasia. Find out ahead of time whether you can legally bury these animals on your property. If not, you will need to pay for rendering or cremation services. If you go with cremation, which is often very expensive, you will need to factor this into your operational costs.

We recommend doing necropsy on all animals who die of unknown causes, especially if they showed any symptoms of diseases that could be contagious to your other animals. This is also a good way to learn about what diseases your animals may carry, so you can treat others accordingly. Many states offer free necropsy services, but some charge a fee.

**Record Keeping**

A chart should be created for each animal upon their arrival. The chart should include the arrival date, sex, breed, identifying marks, age or best estimate of age, and, if known, a history of where they came from and the conditions there. If you have multiple animals of the same species who are not easily distinguished by markings, outfit them with some form of ID and record each animal’s ID number in their chart. Chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese can easily be fitted with numbered leg bands. Leg bands are also available for sheep, goats, and cattle. Collars are a good option for cattle but are inappropriate for sheep and goats, who could hurt themselves by getting the collars caught. Check bands or collars regularly to make sure they have not slipped or become twisted. Be careful to make them tight enough that they stay in place but loose enough that they do not interfere with circulation.

An animal’s chart should include records of every health concern and treatment. Many animals rescued from cruelty cases have health problems, some of them chronic. Good record keeping will enable you to develop optimal treatment regimens to apply in the future; it’s also a crucial tool when prosecuting offenders for abuse or neglect.

Vaccination information should be recorded and accessible. Rabies vaccines, for example, need to be available at all times in case a resident bites a guest or staff member or a rabid wild animal bites a resident. Health certificates and incoming information for any animals transported from out-of-state should also be readily available. If any of your animals are found to have contagious diseases and you cannot present accurate records of their provenance, your organization could be fined, or worse.

Finally, all adoptions and deaths should be recorded on the animals’ charts. Death records should include
cause and manner of death (for example, naturally or through euthanasia). Adoption records should include the adopter's contact information, so you can check back about the animal(s).

**Shelter Regulations**

**Licenses and Permits**

Before starting a sanctuary, decide what types of animals you will shelter and find out what, if any, permits you will need in order to keep and care for them on your property. Also ensure that you are properly zoned not only for the species of animals you will be housing but also for the number of each species you plan to take in. Currently there are no state or federal permits required to care for food production animals; this category includes chickens, cattle, ducks, geese, donkeys, goats, pigs, rabbits, sheep, and turkeys (but it excludes some exotics that are sometimes used for food, such as ostriches). The USDA or state department of agriculture may visit your shelter to see if you need to be licensed as an exhibitor. Since your primary purpose is to house, feed, and care for farm animals, you should not be required to get an exhibition permit, but the laws are constantly changing.

The health department will require certain permits as well, including a permit to have and use hypodermic needles. Other permits may include having controlled substances on the property, and all will require proper storage and disposal. Needles, for example, should be locked up at all times and disposed of in locked sharps containers that are then picked up by a licensed disposal company.
State Veterinary Requirements

Your state Department of Agriculture requires various blood tests and identifications for certain species entering from other states. This is true both for animals you are bringing into the shelter and for those you are transporting to adoptive homes. Often only a health certificate is required. Find out exactly what the regulations are and follow them to the letter. If you are stopped by a law enforcement agent while transporting animals without proper documentation, the state may confiscate and euthanize the animals or charge you large fines. With new diseases coming to the attention of the public, the fear of transporting animals across state lines has increased and will most likely continue to do so. Following all regulations for transport and testing is imperative for the safety of all the animals in your care.

Sanctuary Administrative Procedures

Administration and Accounting

Sound administration and accounting practices are not only necessary to operate a sanctuary, they are also required by law. As a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization, you are required to complete annual registration and financial reports at both the state and federal level. Basic spreadsheet or database software is essential to make record keeping manageable. In addition, general accounting software can be a valuable resource and increase the ease of filing annual tax returns. If you are unfamiliar with these types of programs, take computer classes at your local community college. The investment in this education will be well worth the time.

From the moment of your very first donation, you will need to maintain contribution records (name, address, date, donation amount) on all members. You will also need to keep detailed accounting registers of all revenues, expenses, and expenditures. The law does not stipulate that nonprofit organizations enlist an accountant to maintain their financial records, but you may find it very helpful to have one set up your accounting books and teach you the requirements for financial reports. After your revenues exceed a certain dollar amount, the government does require you to undergo an annual, independent audit by a certified public accountant. Establishing good initial accounting practices and procedures will prevent future problems and ensure that you keep your state and federal nonprofit status.

In addition to the annual financial reports required by state and federal agencies, you should also complete an annual financial report for your members. This report is an excellent way to show your contributors how their money is being spent. Write to other animal protection organizations for samples of annual reports. As your organization and budget grow, so will the amount of reporting that is required. If you plan to fundraise outside of the state in which you are located, you will eventually need to register with numerous state agencies across the country. There has been an attempt to standardize this reporting, and the following website is an excellent resource covering requirements for all 50 states: multistatefiling.org. If you sell merchandise, you may also need to acquire a permit and license to collect sales tax, which involves additional reporting throughout the year.

Office Technology

When choosing computers for your organization, consider the types of software packages you want to use and the aptitudes of your staff. Whether you opt to purchase new computers or request donated ones, review the
specifications closely to make sure they meet all of your needs. Invest in anti-virus and anti-spyware software. Make sure to back up important files regularly, even if that means simply copying them to relatively inexpensive external hard drives. Back-up disks or drives should be stored securely or off-site. Your computers may come with simple backup software also. Many technology companies offer discounts to nonprofits, so be sure to research prior to purchasing by visiting the company’s website or techsoup.com. Also remember that there are IT consulting firms at various price points that can provide helpful advice and services to new organizations that do not have full-time IT staff.

When you are first starting, you may not need or be able to afford advanced database software to track your donations, members, or animal records. However, there are steps you can take that will make it easier for you to convert to a more complex system as you grow. If you are using a basic spreadsheet, enter information in separate fields instead of grouping the data in one field (for example, keep first name and last name in different fields). It is also important to be consistent in your data entry, especially with abbreviations.

Technology Resources

Resources on the subject of making good software decisions for nonprofits: www.idealware.org
Software and technology discount information, as well as free apps and downloads: www.techsoup.com

Operating Budget

Budget carefully — the lives of the sanctuary animals depend on it. Many well-intentioned sanctuaries have closed because of their failure to budget well. It is difficult to say no, but always saying yes can lead to financial crises. Start slowly and research exactly what it costs to provide for animals currently under your care, as well as for animals you are considering bringing to the shelter. Figure out both how much you are likely to spend and how much you will need to raise each year. Construction or large project expenses tend to be the focus of budget reviews, but these are often the least problematic factors because they are one-time expenses. It
is critical that you pay close attention to your ongoing expenses such as feed, bedding, veterinary care, and other daily care costs. You must also consider the administrative, legal, and other recurring expenses that are necessary to keep your sanctuary operating.

Volunteers

Most new sanctuaries depend on volunteers to help care for the animals and assist with mailings and other important projects. Some have live-in volunteer internship programs, which can be very helpful if your sanctuary is located in a remote, rural area. Others host monthly work parties or have regular weekly volunteers. Promote your volunteer program through local newspapers, posted fliers, and other means of free or low-cost advertising. Look for that special sanctuary person who is as good with people as he or she is with animals and ask him or her to be your volunteer coordinator.

Although they don’t receive wages, volunteers do need regular acknowledgment and support from you. Find out what your volunteers’ interests are and try to meet their needs. Host volunteer recognition dinners and special events. Most importantly, let them know each day how much their help means to you and to the animals.

Staff

As your sanctuary grows, you may find your one-person operation can no longer operate with only one person. Caring for animals is a 365-day-a-year job, and at some point, successful sanctuaries need to hire paid, trained staff. Finding compassionate, qualified animal caregivers, however, is no easy task. Your volunteer program can provide a great opportunity to recruit staff members.

As with a volunteer program, meeting the needs of your employees is very important. Management training, personnel skills, and a willingness to allocate time and effort for employment development will be necessary. As an employer, you will also be required to know and adhere to all state and federal employee regulations and registrations, have worker’s compensation insurance, and complete employee payrolls and governmental reports. Your obligations as an employer will be almost identical to those of any for-profit business. The addition of paid staff will increase sanctuary expenses and management time, but good employees will allow you to do much more for animals. They are essential to your sanctuary’s future.

Insurance

Requirements for insurance vary by state, so check in with your state authorities to make certain you are in compliance with obligations for workers’ compensation insurance, auto insurance, etc. General sanctuary liability insurance is typically a good idea, primarily to protect the organization in the event of a lawsuit. This is particularly important when you begin to have regular visitors, volunteers, and staff. Prices and coverage options vary considerably and can become complex.

Shop around for insurance coverage and consider engaging a licensed insurance broker guide you in these decisions. Because farm animal sanctuaries are not common, different insurance companies may categorize your organization differently, and therefore prices may vary greatly. Depending on the extent of the physical infrastructure and equipment at your sanctuary, the type of organization it is, and other factors, additional policies such as property insurance, directors and officers insurance, inland marine coverage, or umbrella coverage may also be in order.
DEVELOPING A SANCTUARY

Fundraising

For sanctuaries, the saying “if you build it, they will come” refers to animals, not funding. It takes enormous amounts of time and expertise to raise the resources necessary for the operation of a sanctuary.

Direct Mail

Donations from individuals will provide the majority of your annual budget — and, in the case of many small organizations, all of it. Therefore a significant effort must go into attracting new members and keeping existing ones. One of the most economical and effective ways to attract and keep new members is a regular mailing program (usually referred to as “direct mail”). The U.S. Postal Service gives special bulk-mail rates to nonprofit organizations; you can find instruction booklets at your local post office.

Acquisition Mailings

If you’ve ever become a member of an animal protection organization, you probably soon started receiving mail from dozens of other groups. This is because organizations rent or trade their mailing lists. Many use mailing list brokers; one popular firm is Names in the News. Typically, you need to bring a list of at least 5,000 members to the table. You’ll also need to present a sample of your mailing piece. Then the broker will help find organizations that are willing to rent or trade with you.

For acquisition mailings, you can expect between a one and two percent return rate. That’s why organizations tend to mail to hundreds of thousands of people. Start small, but just remember that the normal rate of return is low. Acquisition mailings are not necessarily good fundraisers but rather are used to bring in new members who will continue to contribute throughout the year. Don’t forget to have a sign-up sheet at every meeting, animal event, conference, and outreach table to gather names of potential new members.

In-house Mailings

In-house mailings (i.e. mailings to your own donors) are fundraisers, and with these, unlike with acquisition mailings, you can expect to raise significant funding for your sanctuary. The general rule is to send out three to four in-house mailings each year, with each one providing donors an opportunity to contribute to a different project or campaign. For example, one in-house mailing might be for building a new barn, while another mailing might request monthly sponsors for the sanctuary animals.

Start collecting direct mail appeals from other organizations to learn how they write both acquisition and in-house mailings. You will find there are distinct ways to appeal for membership funds. Test various techniques to see what works best for you, and then stick with it! Check out direct mail guru Mal Warwick’s website (malwarwick.com) to learn all about the ins and outs of direct mail fundraising. Remember that maintaining an accurate and regularly updated membership list is crucial for a successful membership direct mail program.
Membership Enhancement

Renewal Notices

Every year you will need to raise funds for the care of your animals. Your annual shelter expenses will not decrease (in fact, they will probably increase each year), and it is important to let your members know you depend on their annual commitment — whether it’s $10 or $10,000. This is particularly important for animal shelters that have annual, ongoing animal care costs. Do not shy away from sending your members renewal notices. Many nonprofit organizations send out three or four notices per year; some send out more. Set up a regular renewal notice schedule. Your members must know how much you appreciate and need their ongoing support.

Donor Calls and Visits

Get to know your members, especially ones who have made a major commitment to your sanctuary. Make the time to call major contributors and, when possible, visit them. Members like to be recognized and appreciated, and contacting them also provides an opportunity to find out what they think about your work. Always extend an open invitation to all your members to visit the sanctuary, where they can see their support in action. Keeping members involved and active in your sanctuary is crucial, and often a simple call and thank you is all it takes.

Donor Recognition

In addition to personally thanking your members, it’s important to provide special recognition at various levels of donation. For large donations, consider offering permanent plaques on barns, signs listing supporters at special events, and a listing of supporters in your newsletter.

Other Fundraising Efforts

Online Fundraising

Your website and email lists are vital tools for raising funds, especially for urgent and immediate needs. Once the infrastructure is established, this method of fundraising is also virtually cost-free. You can use it to solicit funds for new rescues or special projects throughout the year in between fundraising mailings and also to send an electronic version of your direct mail appeals to give members an online giving option. It’s important to offer
a secure method of transmitting credit card and other personal information; this technology is available through a number of online resources for nonprofit fundraising, such as JustGive.org.

**Fundraising Events**

In addition to educational or open-house events, an annual fundraising event is an excellent way to meet your members, keep them engaged in your organization, and raise significant funds. A benefit dinner or cocktail party held around the same time each year gives members something to look forward to. The location could be your sanctuary or a local restaurant or catering facility. Try to get food and beverages donated to save on costs; consider incorporating a silent auction with donated artwork, gift baskets, gift certificates, and other unique items; present awards to volunteers or major supporters involved in your organization; create a slide show presentation to share happy endings and the year’s accomplishments; and recruit volunteers to help organize.

**Donations-in-kind**

Donations-in-kind (that is, non-cash donations) can be extremely helpful and should never be overlooked. Many businesses and companies are happy to help, but it is often easier for them to donate items rather than cash. All you have to do is ask — the worst they can say is no! Call area businesses and ask to speak to the owner or manager, explain (concisely) what you do and what you need from their business, and let them know you will be happy to recognize their support in your newsletter. Every year, sanctuaries receive donations of everything from blankets to food to vehicles. And don’t forget to ask your members for these items too. Every sanctuary should have a wish list. Put your list in your newsletter regularly or post it on your website.

**Grants**

Many people are under the impression that foundations are abundant and waiting in line to give you money. Actually, your sanctuary needs to get in line, and it’s a very long line. There are only a handful of foundations that provide grants for animal protection work; typically these foundations receive more than 200 applications per year and give out only 10 to 20 grants. You should never count on foundation support for your annual operating budget, but it is often helpful for one-time costs, such as building housing facilities or establishing new programs.

Your grant proposal will need to be well-written, concise, and in the proper format. Check the library for books on grant-writing basics that contain sample grants and other useful information. Grant writing and foundation resources are available online at foundationcenter.org, and your library should also have grant directories where you can look up foundations that support animal protection work. Write to these foundations and ask for a grant application, information on the type of animal projects they support, and any upcoming leads for proposals.

**Bequests**

Encourage your members to consider including your sanctuary in their estate planning. Funding from bequest gifts is very helpful and can be a substantial resource. Bequest gifts are most useful for one-time sanctuary expenses or special projects that are not part of your ongoing annual budget. Include information on bequest giving in your newsletter, and ask members to let you know if they are leaving a bequest gift to your sanctuary. This information is useful for your future planning and allows you to thank the members and let them know how much you appreciate their commitment.
Outreach and Visitor Programs

Special Events and Conferences

Many sanctuaries regularly hold events and conferences to bring in new members and say thanks to their existing ones. People love to get to know you and the animals and to socialize with fellow animal advocates! Your events can range from simple open houses to weekend-long getaways complete with speaker presentations, meals, and shelter time.

Events need not be expensive. Keep your food and entertainment costs reasonable (which often means doing it yourself or finding businesses to donate), gather a committee of volunteers to help you, and take advantage of the many animal protection speakers who give presentations free-of-charge. Keep in mind that special events and conferences can be very time-consuming. Make sure you and your volunteers are able to put in the time to make the project a success.

Visitor Programs

No one sanctuary can take in all the animals in need of rescue. Through an effective visitor tour program, you can extend the impact of your work beyond the animals in your care. Your animal ambassadors will reach and teach thousands of people, showing them that farm animals are sentient beings with individual personalities, just like their dogs and cats.

You will find it helpful to have an established tour schedule so that tours do not interfere with your daily animal care. Take notice of which animals like human interaction and which animals do not, and arrange your tours accordingly. For example, Farm Sanctuary does not allow visitors to go into the rabbit barns or pastures because our rabbits give warning thumps when strangers enter their space. Tours should always be conducted with the animals’ needs in mind, and all sanctuary animals should be able to avoid human contact when they want to. Also, for the safety of the animals and people, we recommend that tours be given only with a trained tour guide. Though considerable effort and time must go into operating a good tour program, it is a great opportunity for people to connect with the animals, which will bring in new members and allow existing members to see their support in action.

Communicating with Members and the Public

Savvy communications are crucial to building membership, drawing participation to your programs, and educating the public about your mission. If you do not have communications specialists on staff, consider seeking skilled volunteers or freelancers (copy writers, graphic designers, etc.) in order to ensure that your resources are deployed effectively.

Brochures

You should create a basic brochure presenting your organization’s values, mission, and programs, for distribution to members, visitors, and event guests. As your programs grow, you may find it useful to create a separate brochure for each one, so you can direct readers to specific actions (e.g. encouraging them to sponsor a shelter
resident, apply to an adoption network, or join a special membership category). Free brochure templates are available online; just type “free brochure templates” into a search engine for a variety of options. Additionally, print-houses such as FedEx/Kinkos offer design services.

Website

You will need at least a basic site providing contact information and a description of your organization. Even the untrained can easily create a simple site using one of the free web-hosting services. We recommend Wordpress, which allows users to operate a website and a blog through a single account; several free or cheap tutorials on how to make the most of Wordpress can be found online. As you grow, you can add features. Prioritize sections on how to donate and how to visit and/or get involved, a section for sharing photos and stories of the sanctuary animals, and a blog or update section with news about sanctuary happenings.

E-communications

Once your website is developed and you’ve begun building a membership list, one of the most cost-effective and least time-consuming ways to stay in touch with your members is to create an opt-in, monthly or weekly e-newsletter sent to their inboxes. This will allow you to notify them about rescues, upcoming events, and new programs. In addition to the regular newsletter, e-alerts can draw attention to urgent needs, such as funds for emergency rescues and projects. Because there are laws about sending e-mail alerts (e.g. e-mails requesting money must include the organization’s financial information), you should seek the assistance of an e-alert service to help build and send these messages. It’s worth paying a consultant once a month to ensure that you are meeting all the legal requirements.
Social Media

Make a Facebook page. It’s ridiculously easy, and it will put your communications right in the personal news feeds that your supporters are checking several times a day anyway. A well-maintained and frequently updated Facebook page will introduce supporters to the animals at your shelter and cultivate their sense of investment in your organization. Commenting on photos, sharing important messages and videos with their friends, or even just hitting “like” on a status update that strikes a chord will allow your Facebook friends to feel that they are participating in your work — and enable them to amplify your communications efforts.

Some tips: When posting status updates or photos, ask a question (e.g. “Who is your favorite animal to visit?” “What do you think is making [animal’s name] smile?”). Respond to users who post comments and questions, even if it’s just hitting “like.” Facebook newsfeeds are a selection of posts based on algorithms, and photos get priority, so consider adding a photo whenever you post info or a link. Post things that make people smile and laugh — they’ll be more inspired to share. For more tips, check out the Nonprofit Facebook Guy, a great, free resource for emerging trends, research, and tools for social media engagement. Media Bistro also provides tips on best practices and free webinars.

Print Newsletters

Your members want and deserve to know how their funds are spent, and a print newsletter, published two to four times a year, will allow you to provide this information engagingly. The newsletter need not be colorful or expensive. It simply needs to present your latest news, and some photographs of your shelter animals, in an attractive format. Use your newsletter to invite members to events, announce new arrivals, and share opportunities for involvement.

Media Relations

The media provide one of the most effective means of educating the public about animal protection issues and getting people involved in your efforts. The goal of media relations is to build relationships over time. Use a spreadsheet or database to track your communications with media contacts — this is essential for establishing yourself as a good source for news and information. Start with local media. Once you have gotten the hang of drawing coverage at that level, expand your efforts to regional, statewide, and national outlets as appropriate. When working to develop awareness of your sanctuary in your community, you will have two primary media tools: Events Listings and Press Releases.

Events Listings

Your local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations offer FREE announcements for events offered by nonprofit organizations. Radio and television announcement spots are called “Public Service Announcements” (PSAs), and newspapers offer “Community Calendar Listings.” This type of media is used primarily for monthly meetings, volunteer recruitment, and special events. Call your local media (you can find contact information either on the website for the media outlet or in the yellow pages under the newspaper, radio, and television section). Ask to speak to the person who handles PSAs or Community Calendar Listings. Get in touch with that person directly, introduce yourself, find out when announcements need to be received, the correct format, etc., and thank them for including your announcements. PSAs and Community Calendar listings are short and to the
point and typically have to be received at least three weeks prior to your event, sometimes longer. PSAs usually should be short enough to be read in 30 seconds (though sometimes 60 second PSAs are allowed). Practice reading your PSA before submitting it to make sure it’s the appropriate length. Always include a contact name and phone number at the top of your announcement.

**Press Releases**

Press releases are used to publicize news-making events at your sanctuary (e.g. new arrivals, dramatic rescue efforts, etc.) They are generally one page, with the principal facts (who, what, when, where, and how) in the first paragraph, followed by additional details. Do an Internet search for “sample press releases.” There are distinct press release formats, and you will find it helpful to learn them.

Newspapers, radio stations, and television stations receive hundreds of press releases daily. To make yours stand out, CALL each newspaper or station you are pursuing and get the name (and correct spelling) of the news or assignment editor/director, along with their preferred form of contact. E-mail the press release to their attention, then follow up with a phone call. If your news is breaking, keep trying until you reach someone live at the assignment or news desk. The best time to reach media is in the morning between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Once you’ve reached the appropriate person, enthusiastically pitch your story (e.g. why it’s so unique, how it benefits readers/viewers, etc.). That said, know your limits. Always think in terms of their target viewership/readership. If the story is important to them, it will be important to the journalist. NEVER call on deadline (daily newspapers are on deadline every day after 3:00 p.m.). Journalists are as busy as you are — do not annoy them with superfluous information. Again, the key to successful media relations is to build strong, long-term relationships.

**Pro Tip #1**

The new 24/7 news cycle has made time an even scarcer commodity for journalists. For this reason, consider sending your news or story idea in the form of a short 1- to 2-paragraph pitch, rather than a formal press release. Not only do short pitches get read more often by busy reporters, but they also appear more exclusive than a formal release (which signals mass distribution) and appeal to reporters looking for a scoop.

**Pro Tip #2**

The media are ALWAYS looking for cute, heartwarming stories of survival against all odds, second chances, and unlikely friendships forged between animals of different species. Fortunately, farm animal sanctuaries offer a never-ending supply of these kinds of stories. Make sure to keep your eyes open to the stories unfolding all around you and share them with the media. Studies have shown that anytime a story promoting compassion for farm animals appears in the media, there is a corresponding drop in meat consumption.
Farm Sanctuary is North America’s largest and most effective farm animal rescue and protection organization. Since 1986, Farm Sanctuary has worked to expose and stop cruel practices of the “food animal” industry through research and investigations, legal and institutional reforms, public awareness projects, youth education, and direct rescue and shelter efforts. Farm Sanctuary shelters in Watkins Glen, New York; Orland, California; and Los Angeles provide lifelong care for hundreds of rescued animals. These animals stand as ambassadors for the billions on factory farms who have no voice, and their stories help raise awareness about the brutal realities of factory farming.

farmsanctuary.org