A
IMALS can contribute far more to society than food, clothing, and by-products. Throughout history, animals have aided in the establishment of cities, beautified the countryside, and added to the joy of recreation. They have also served society in other ways. In this E-unit, explore the many ways that humans enjoy the benefits of animals.

**Objective:**

- Identify ways animals serve society.

**Key Terms:**

- companion animal
- pleasure animal
- service animal

**How Animals Benefit Society**

Animals in our society benefit all of us, from the small farmer raising livestock in the country to the police officer fighting crime in the city. Beyond providing the primary products of food and clothing, animals play vital roles in more than just our agricultural industry. Animals help people in four main ways: companionship and pleasure, service, conservation, and stabilization of the economy.
Some animals are identified as companion animals, and others as pleasure animals. A **companion animal** is an animal that helps a person enjoy life. For example, dogs, cats, birds, reptiles, and ornamental fish serve as pets for humans in today’s society. A **pleasure animal** is an animal used for recreation or sport. Horses used for riding provide a major source of recreation for many people. Furthermore, goats and bulls are used in rodeos.

Another area in which animals are used to assist humans is that of service and work. This area uses the skills of animals to aid humans in society. Whether through a dog’s sense of smell and direction or the strength of a team of horses, animals greatly affect the lives of many people in today’s world. A **service animal** is an animal that assists people in living and work. There are many different types of service animals and a variety of different training areas. For example, dogs are used to help persons whose vision or hearing is impaired, to herd sheep, or even to guard property. In addition, dogs aid in the fight against crime by being an integral force of police canine units. Animals are carefully used in laboratories for discovering new medicines to cure human diseases.

Perhaps one of the most important benefits of animals is the contribution of livestock to the conservation of soil and soil fertility. The grasses and legumes used to feed livestock are soil-conserving crops. They form protective covers on the land and help prevent wind and water erosion. Nutrients are removed from the soil by the crops being grown. When the crops are fed to livestock, about 80 percent of the nutrient value is excreted in the manure. Putting manure back into the soil decreases the loss of soil fertility.
The benefits of animals can have a great impact on the U.S. economy. Livestock help bring stability to farm businesses. Raising livestock makes good use of the resources already available to farmers—land, labor, capital, and managerial ability—and can increase farm income. Including livestock in a farm business helps spread risks over more enterprises. Also, both labor and income are distributed more evenly throughout the year.

**Summary:**

Besides providing food and clothing, animals help people in many areas of today’s society. Companionship, pleasure, service, conservation, and stabilization of the economy are but a few of the contributions animals make that help our society function. Throughout our history, animals have been used to till the soil, aid in transportation, and build structures. The role of animals might have changed, but they still greatly affect our society.

**Checking Your Knowledge:**

1. What term is given to an animal that helps a person enjoy life?
2. What characterizes a service animal?
3. What percentage of the nutrient value is excreted in the manure when crops are fed to livestock?
4. Raising livestock makes good use of what four resources already available to farmers?

**Expanding Your Knowledge:**

Do animals enhance your life in ways other than the food you eat or the clothes you wear? Look at ways animals assist people in your community, your school, or even your city government. How do animals help? Why are they needed? Can they be replaced by technology? Why or why not? Write a one-page response to these questions.

**Web Links:**

- North American Riding for the Handicapped Association
- Rural Heritage Online
- Animal Waste Management