

Heifer International Romania/Moldova Study Tour September 2-13, 2010

Heifer Romania has hosted over the years several international study tours and visits. It is a great opportunity for people to become more familiar with our work. The decision to attend offers the opportunity to enter the daily lives of people that are part of the multinational Heifer family. Participants witness on hand the Heifer principles and discover their impact on people's lives.

From September 2-13, 2010, a Heifer International Study Tour visited Romania and Moldova. Twelve participants followed a 12 day itinerary through these two Central Eastern European countries.



Study Tour participants visiting the Heifer Romania office

Their journey started in Cluj-Napoca. After the American guests got acquainted and visited the city's highlights, it was time for the first field visit. September 4 was a busy day for the study tour participants. In the Tamasa village, they met some of our "Farmers Feed the Children" project participants and visited their homes, families and livestock. The day continued with a "Passing on the Gift" ceremony where everybody had the opportunity to meet Gheorghe Muresan, the most famous Romanian basketball player. At 7 foot 7 inches (2.31 meters), he is the tallest man that ever played in the NBA in the U.S.



Tour participants and Gheorghe Muresan

Each study tour member had the chance to actively get involved in the lottery draw that distributed the heifers. At the end of the day one study tour participants wrote in the group's journal: "It was a long day full of wonderful experiences and wonderful people."

On the next day we traveled to Nemsă and visited the "Alpine Goats for Two Poor Communities" project. Pamela Dostart wrote in their trip journal: "Our two Roma hosts proudly showed us their barns and goats. At the end of the village was the goat farm...the goats and rams were beautiful to look at; you could tell they

were well taken care of." Susan Fulton, Heifer International Board member, expressed thanks on behalf of the group. The Roma men were eager to show their gratitude.

Once the visit ended we traveled to the medieval city of Sighisoara where we spent the night. "It seems after four days that we have become a family," was Pamela's last journal entry for the day. In the morning we had a tour of the city and after lunch we hopped on the bus to continue the journey. We crossed the Carpathian Mountains on the way to Vrancea, which was the next stop.

September 7 was a special day. It started with visiting families that are part of the "Sheep, Bees and Reforestation Project" in Vrancea. Carol Duffe wrote in the group's journal: "We visited the homes of three beneficiaries of the sheep project. The mayor accompanied us, and I think the host families were quite honored to receive us all. They were all very gracious to us. At the last house the husband and wife and their four young kids seemed excited to have us there. We were all invited into their house, where we saw one of their



Milk Collecting Point in Nemsă

small rooms which included a kitchen, bed and play area. It was cozy, neat and very compact.”

The study tour participants also saw an area planted with acacia trees, part of the project’s reforestation component. Next they joined the community in celebrating the Passing on the Gift of honeybees and original placement of sheep. The ceremony took place in an orchard where temporary shelters were built for the animals. Carol wrote, “There was a group dressed in traditional outfits that did folk dancing culminating with all of us being invited to join in a big circle and

dance with them.” Sarah Donaghy, Study Tour Leader, addressed a few words of thanks for the warm welcome. She congratulated the project coordinators and the project participants for their hard work. We visited the seismological center in Vrancea and spent the night in the community.

The middle of the trip was September 8, marked on the calendar as the celebration of the birth of Mary, mother of Jesus. The itinerary brought us to Rebricea, the location for launching a new pig project. It was rainy and muddy. The community was excited and did not mind the weather. They were happy to meet Susan Fulton, Heifer International Board Member and study tour participant, who made an important financial contribution for the project’s development. Susan wished the community good luck and promised to return at the first “Passing on the Gift” ceremony.

The rest of the day was spent driving to Chisinau, the capital city of The Republic of Moldova. We were welcomed by Vladimir Javgureanu, our field assistant and got acquainted during a late dinner.

Carnateni was the first community visited during the first full day in Moldova. The Americans met Lidia Voronco, the leader of the “Dairy Cattle Project in Carnateni,” an exceptional woman who is highly dedicated to develop her community. The beneficiaries were excited to welcome guests from far away and were eager to welcome everyone into their home.



Launching the “Pigs Project for Rebricea”

September 10 was all about experiencing more Moldova. The afternoon was dedicated for souvenir shopping and walking around Chisinau.

The “Rabbits Project in Vadu Rascov” was the last Heifer program we visited. The village is situated near the separatist region of Transnistria and political tensions are still rough. Heifer Romania developed the rabbit project that expanded across the river surpassing any barriers. The community in Vadu Rascov proved that the Passing on the Gift principle is stronger than any conflict or economic interest.

On the last day the participants reflected on the high points and low points of the trip. It was time to return home.

Ann Richards returned home and on October 3, held a sermon to praise Heifer’s work in the world and talked about her experience as a study tour participant. “Heifer International is making a difference around the globe in the lives of people. By providing animals,

education and support, entire villages are enabled to take that step forward in faith that Jesus was talking about, helping them to figuratively move the mountains in their lives. Mountains, such as lack of education, low self-esteem, poverty and hunger. They learn about caring and sharing, improving the environment, justice for the marginally oppressed, sustainability and self-reliance, hope, and a sense of responsibility to work together for a better future. Most importantly, they learn about Passing on the Gift.

The participants shared what they have learned on this trip:

- "Just how significant Passing on the Gift is... we hear the phrase and understand but to see it in action is incredible."
- "The very visceral sense that this is making a difference in peoples' lives"
- "The context... I understand a little bit more about why the work here is significant and how it fits into the bigger picture."
- "I don't think I realized the importance of the in-country people...not only for improving projects but sticking with it to make it even better...a real credit to the staff... extraordinarily dedicated and capable."
- "Poverty is not as scary as I thought. People survive it with their souls intact."

*Submitted by Annamaria Heler
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Visiting the "Rabbits Project in Vadu Rascov"