



viva news

Volunteers in Irish Veterinary Assistance

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Supporting Livestock, Supporting People

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2011 WAS DESIGNATED THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING.

To celebrate the voluntary spirit at the heart of VIVA, in this issue we feature some of our volunteers who tell us why they get involved. In addition, we take a look at what has been achieved in the first three years of our Ugandan Animal Traction Project.

Message from the Chairman

As we come to the end of the European Year of Volunteering it is appropriate to acknowledge the benefits of volunteering for the volunteer. A number of studies have shown that volunteering has health benefits and that older people who volunteer enjoy longer lives, higher functional ability, and lower rates of depression and heart disease. People who volunteer are usually more outgoing people who are also happier with themselves. Volunteering reduces the risk of depression and is also an excellent way to increase one's self esteem and self-worth. It reduces feelings of frustration particularly as we become increasingly overwhelmed by bad news and confronted with intractable situations. Volunteering also creates opportunities to practice and enhance important skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organisation.

VIVA have been lucky over the past decade to be blessed with people who have played the various roles of financial supporters, patrons, event organisers and field volunteers at different times depending on their availability and the needs of VIVA at any particular time. This newsletter traces the journeys of some of these volunteers and also reports on the first three years of our Ugandan project. The success of this project is due to the input of all our volunteers who have played different but equally important roles.

One again we thank you, our supporters, for your contribution this year and in the past. We also wish you and your families happiness for Christmas and the coming year.

Séan O'Laoidé
VIVA Chairman

The Volunteers!

Due to the efforts of a core group of almost 400 supporters and volunteers who fundraise over €50,000 a year, VIVA is supporting livestock farmers across the globe. As a VIVA Volunteer, no matter what your contribution is you have become part of something much bigger than yourself. These contributions of time and money culminate in projects like the Ugandan Animal Traction project (featured in the following pages) which has transformed the lives of 300 farming families in just three years.

Why do our volunteers become involved and what has their involvement meant to them?
Some of them tell their stories below.

DÓNAL CONNOLLY

Dónal Connolly is a vet in Gort, Co. Galway. His interest in cycling, his farming background and his daily work all came together in his involvement in the VIVA Wheelers who have raised over €185,000 for VIVA. This summer Dónal visited Uganda to see our ploughing project. Here he describes the impact of the visit on him.

As a veterinary practitioner I was proud to be among my veterinary colleagues, both Ugandan and Irish at a ceremony where bulls and ploughs were passed on as gifts to other farmers joining the expanding group known as the Koile Amora Ican Farmers Group. This farmers group in Eastern Uganda have been involved with Viva Ireland and Heifer International for a few years and the 'bulls and ploughs' project has increased their productivity by 800%. There is now enough to eat, a surplus to sell and some money left over to send the kids to school. The Irish and the Ugandan farmer have a lot in common. Subsistence farming is not unknown to many Irish farmers living on marginal land. Difficulties regarding inheritance, land ownership, cultural differences, and political favouritism are issues affecting land usage and the ability to feed a growing population in many African countries.

Watching Ugandan women work with the bulls and ploughs cultivating their small holdings reminds me of my own upbringing on a thirty acre farm in West Cork where we tilled the land with horses. The horse in rural Ireland in the fifties and sixties was central to the economy of small holdings and ploughing, harrowing, rolling and scuffling were seasonal tasks. To me the Uganda we saw at the end of July 2011 was similar to rural Ireland in the early sixties. The progress of their agricultural development can be accelerated by our assistance. The soil is rich and capable of growing anything in this region once the rains come. Rain is regarded as the 'water of life'. How often do we look to the heavens here and curse the volumes of water that bless us on a regular basis?

The experience of what I saw and the people I met have started me on a journey of discovery, a road that requires patience. Patience is an unusual virtue in a society that now wonders what the 'Celtic Tiger' did for them. Why use bulls to plough was on my lips within hours of seeing the sods turning in Koile. Why not send them tractors! Why not indeed I was told but then the tractor would be such a political animal; who would be ploughed first and who would be the last? Who would repair it when it broke down and fuel is expensive. The hurry was evident to 'fix' things quickly. The patience to allow organic solutions to come from the people at their pace comes slowly. Watching those that have given their lives to this work would teach you patience. I hope I can learn.



Dónal takes the plough himself in Koile

TONY MCMANUS

Tony McManus is a vet working with the Department of Agriculture in Longford. Sharing an office with Brendan Mimmagh, VIVA's founder, led to him becoming involved in VIVA from an early stage. Since 2003, Tony has organized an annual Golf Classic which to date has raised over €60,000 for VIVA's projects. In 2007, Tony visited our projects in Uganda and Tanzania. Here he describes what keeps him involved.

I got involved first when Brendan Mimmagh asked me to do the first Golf Classic in 2003 and while I was aware of the poverty and hopelessness of the stories from Africa nothing could have prepared me for my trip to Uganda and Tanzania. What struck me most was how a little could help so much. I saw how much difference a goat made to a family. I saw that helping people to help themselves was the only way forward. VIVA projects like the draft animal traction programme in Uganda and the village animal health programme in Tanzania were so beneficial and uplifting to the people involved that I vowed to continue to run the golf classic to raise whatever few euros it might raise.

DENIS HEALY

Denis Healy is a vet with the Department of Agriculture in Dublin. Denis has participated in every VIVA Wheelers event and is one of our most successful fundraisers. Denis travelled to Kosovo in 2009 to work on our cattle breeding project there. Here he talks about what motivates his involvement with VIVA.

Too often, everything we do in the developed western world is measured in monetary terms. I initially became involved with VIVA in 2004 when I was inducted into the VIVA Wheelers fundraising gang, cycling the mountain roads of northwest Vietnam. The Moroccan 2007 cycle fundraiser followed. Seeing how the monies raised was judiciously spent, funding projects to improve the subsistence lifestyle of farmers in remote parts of Tanzania, Nepal and Uganda whetted my appetite to become more involved with VIVA fundraising. I visited Kosovo in 2009 to assist in training veterinarians in AI and animal husbandry and in visiting farms I saw at first hand the fruits of VIVA funding. The importance of the "VIVA / Bothar cow" to the improved lifestyle of the post Balkan war 'village farmer' was a joy to behold. We all have busy lifestyles and concerns about the current economic state of our country and the futures for our children. However 'poverty is relative' and being involved with VIVA helps put a perspective on things. Get on your bike to help the lot of the 'small farmer in the Developing World' and as a bonus get your own 'waistline within the 32/37 inch target!



Uganda – 3 years on

This July a VIVA team comprising Mike Burke, Dónal Connolly and Áine Collins (VIVA intern) visited our flagship project in Uganda to assess the progress over the first three years. The team met with members of the Koilie Amora Ican farmers group, visited many of their farms and attended a Passing on the Gift ceremony where some of the farmers passed on oxen to other farmers in the group.

For a modest investment of €120,000 the lives of over 300 farming families has been transformed. The main successes are in the area of increased crop yields, the status of women and the use of income from the sales of surpluses by farmers to improve their situation.

In the three years the programme has been running, 276 oxen and 64 ploughs have been distributed. The concept is simple - groups of four farmers led by a lead farmer work together to plough their plots, the Ugandan version of our "meitheal". Each farmer contributes an ox to the plough team and they share a plough. Household food production has doubled due to increased acreages being planted and timelier planting.

The status of women has improved dramatically in the community. Over half the beneficiaries are women and they comprise half of the executive committee. Ploughing with oxen has removed a lot of the drudgery associated with crop production which was mainly carried out in the past by women and children. Owning an asset like an ox has given these women a new found respect in the community and enabled them to take more leadership roles. Another aspect of the project which has improved their quality of life is the installation of smokeless, energy efficient stoves. These use less wood than open fires and the absence of smoke has significant health benefits.

Now that farmers are producing surpluses, they can generate cash incomes from the sale of these to educate their children, buy more land or diversify into other enterprises.

The VIVA team also attended a "Passing on the Gift" ceremony during their visit. Once farmers start selling their surplus they must buy an ox for a new member. In this manner, today's beneficiary becomes tomorrow's donor.

LEAD FARMER – ESEZA APPOLOT

Eseza and her three fellow farmers (see cover photo) took delivery of their oxen and plough in March 2010. In addition to the agricultural training she has installed an energy-efficient stove and implemented the sanitation improvements such as pit latrines and hand-washing units. Garden plots are now producing tomatoes, onions, eggplant, kale and green pepper.

In her arable plots she is growing maize, millet, groundnuts and cassava. Yields have increased dramatically e.g. groundnut yields are up 600%. Eseza explained that the major benefit of the animal traction intervention was that they can plant in time (as soon as the rain falls), they can plant more and their technical knowledge has improved dramatically due to the training received. The building of a granary means they can store millet for up to three years. What was particularly interesting was that these four women keep their 4 bulls together on the lead farm unlike other groups where each farmer houses his own oxen. This highlights the high level of co-operation that has developed in some groups.



A farmer receives her new ox

Mike O'Leary Trust Travel Bursary

This year's winner of the Mike O'Leary Trust Travel Bursary was Áine Ní Choileáin a third year veterinary student from Co. Cork. Áine travelled to Uganda in July to visit our animal traction project in the Koile district in eastern Uganda.

This is the seventh year of the Bursary which sponsors a veterinary student each year to spend a month working on one of VIVA's overseas projects. The Mike O'Leary Trust was established to honour the memory of Kerry vet, Mike O'Leary, who died tragically in 2003 at the age of 39. His family and friends have undertaken a number of fundraising initiatives over the years to raise funds for the Travel Bursary in addition to supporting the Irish NGO, GOAL, and cardiomyopathy research.



Cooking millet porridge and corn on a Lorena stove

While in Uganda, Áine focussed on the role of women in agriculture in Uganda. Her report highlighted how the status of women has been transformed by their involvement in the project. About half the beneficiaries are women and the economic independence this has brought has given them a new status in the community. They now make up half of the executive committee that runs the project. In addition, many of the other initiatives in the project such as the installation of energy efficient stoves (Lorena Stoves) have greatly improved their quality of life. These stoves eliminate cooking over an open fire which in addition to being inefficient has significant health effects on the women and children who do the cooking. Exposure to indoor cooking smoke is the equivalent of smoking 40 cigarettes a day and it is the number one killer of children under 5 in the Developing World. The fact that they use less fuel (wood or charcoal) has benefits in terms of deforestation and the time spent by women and children in collecting fuel.



Áine with some new friends



The VIVA Wheelers

The VIVA Wheelers are a group of cyclists of all ages and abilities who have raised almost €180,000 for VIVA's projects worldwide with fundraising cycles in Vietnam (2005), Morocco (2007), the Burren (2009), Bantry (2010) and Westport (2011)

Join us on Facebook – just search for “VIVA Wheelers” and “like” us!



The Westport Bike 'n Hike

“Nobody told me there'd be days like these” – the words of John Lennon summed up the feelings of many of the cyclists as they struggled to “cycle” through the Doolough valley on VIVA's annual cycle challenge in Westport on September 10th.

This year there was the added significance of “Vet 250” (the 250th anniversary of the veterinary profession) which led to Veterinary Ireland coming on board to adopt the cycle as one of its “Vet 250” events. The Veterinary Ireland team was led by its current President, Pat Kirwan, and its CEO, Finbarr Murphy. This initiative led to a greatly increased participation with 70 cyclists taking to the roads. On the suggestion of Michael O'Brien (SVI, Galway DVO) a hike was added to the event which was a great success with 20 walkers turning out on the day.



The cyclists in the spectacular Doolough Valley – Photo courtesy of Peter Kelly

The cyclists and walkers gathered at the Westport Woods Hotel for the off at 10.30 on what was a blustery and wet morning. The walkers were bussed to Newport to begin walking the Great Western Greenway to Mulranny. The cyclists took the coastal route out to Louisburgh past Croagh Patrick. After the first stop at 25km, the trip got interesting! This is where the cyclists entered the Doolough Valley. The nature of the valley meant that it acted like a funnel and the already strong winds blowing on the day were converted into a gale. The winds were so strong, in fact, that the event became a slow bicycle race. Many participants had their bikes brought to a halt by the force of the wind and once they stopped they were blown off the road. One unfortunate cyclist even had his contact lens sucked out by the wind. Lunch in Leenane provided some respite for the cyclists and after the soup and sandwiches they only had to cope with “normal” wind and rain. However, the route itself showcases some amazing scenery and will have to be re-visited by the Wheelers at a later date to be properly appreciated.

The walkers enjoyed more pleasant conditions as they walked the 18km from Newport to Mulranny on the Great Western Greenway. This off-road hiking and biking trail follows the old Newport to Mulranny railway and offers spectacular views of Clew Bay. Rachel Burgess deserves a special mention for running the route.

A well-deserved dinner in the Sheebeen restaurant sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health rounded off the day. Pfizer were represented on the cycle by Eamon O'Sullivan (their Companion Animal & Equine Manager) who commented that he enjoyed the challenge of completing the cycle in such adverse weather conditions and was grateful to both Syd Nagle and Donagh McDonnell for pulling him through the wind tunnel that was the Doolough Pass!

The event was a huge success with almost €26,000 raised for VIVA's overseas projects.

The VIVA Wheelers offers participants the opportunity to get fit, have fun, explore some of Ireland's most spectacular scenery and support farming families in Africa, Asia and eastern Europe. Why not make joining the VIVA Wheelers your New Year's resolution for 2012? To join our mailing list contact Mike Burke on 086 – 2568357 or mike@viva.ie

For more information and photos of the event visit www.facebook.com/vivawheelers or www.viva.ie/vivawheelers. Many thanks to our two photographers, Peter Kelly and Mícheál Casey, for their efforts on the day and to Irish Cycling Safaris for their logistical support.



Join the Fundraisers

Without your help, VIVA cannot continue to support livestock farmers in the Developing World. With just over 300 regular supporters we have achieved an enormous amount over the last decade but we need new blood. Our two flagship fundraisers are the annual Golf Classic and the VIVA Wheelers cycle challenges. Why not make a New Year's resolution today to join us in one of our events or organise one of your own. We can guarantee you a good day out and the satisfaction of knowing that you've made a significant impact on the life of a farmer in the Developing World.

(For more info contact Mike Burke on 086 – 2568357)

VIVA Golf Classic

On July 29th, the VIVA Golf Classic returned to Tullamore Golf Club one of the most scenic courses in the Midlands. Over 40 teams competed for a host of prizes with Jonathan Cooney's team emerging victorious

Since its inception in 2003, the event has built up a loyal following and has now raised over €60,000 for VIVA's overseas projects.

VIVA would again like to thank Tony McManus for all his efforts in organising the Classic. We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing support of our main sponsors, Univet, C & M Vetlink and Liam McElDowney (Letterkenny veterinary surgeon)



L to R – Leonard Dolan, A. Johnson, Peter Smith, Brendan Mimmagh, Jonathan Cooney, Tony McManus

Inner Wheel Adopts VIVA



Inner Wheel is an international women's organisation which promotes friendship, personal service and international understanding amongst its members. The newly appointed Chairman of District 16 (which comprises 23 clubs across the island of Ireland), Sylvia Tennant, has chosen VIVA as her charity for the year.

On September 3rd, Mike Burke of VIVA gave a presentation to Inner Wheel's annual assembly in Dun Laoghaire on VIVA's overseas projects. Over the next year, Inner Wheel clubs across Ireland will be fundraising for VIVA.

Altamira Elaine goes to Galway

"Altamira Elaine", the VIVA Heifer went to Galway in our first ever raffle. Tommy Casserly, Pollaturick, Milltown, Tuam, Co Galway was our winner and when contacted, Tommy said he'd never won anything in his life and was delighted with his good fortune.

The raffle was a huge success with over 3000 tickets sold, raising €15,000 for VIVA. VIVA would like to thank Brendan & Joan O'Connor from Liscarrroll in Co. Cork for their very generous donation of the Limousin heifer - "Altamira Elaine". We hope she enjoys her new home.



Tax Relief on donations

Did you know that if you give €250 in any one year to VIVA, we can recoup the tax you have paid on it? Irish tax legislation allows for tax relief for the charity on donations greater than €250 in any tax year at the rate of tax that you would have paid. Typically a €250 donation is worth over €430 to VIVA when we claim the tax back. All you have to do is fill out a CHY2 form (it's very easy, takes about 5 mins) and post it back to VIVA and we will be able to claim back the tax you paid on the donation amount from the Revenue Commissioners.

You are of course under no obligation to fill in this form but it allows us to benefit from your hard earned tax Euros at no extra cost to yourselves.

If you are self-employed you can claim this tax relief yourself on your annual return to the Revenue Commissioners. For more details contact VIVA.

Regular Giving

Regular giving such as direct debits enables VIVA to predict its income more accurately and plan accordingly. Why not take out a direct debit in favour of VIVA? A monthly donation of €22 will allow us to claim tax relief on your donation (or in the case of the self-employed, this tax relief can be claimed by the donor).

To take out a direct debit, contact VIVA for an application form (see contact details on Page 1)

Fundraising Events

Why not mark a significant birthday with a fundraising challenge?

If our VIVA Wheelers cycle challenges don't grab your fancy why not run or walk a marathon or half-marathon?

VIVA is now registered on www.sponsor.ie. With Sponsor.ie you can set up your own fundraising page in 5 minutes, email the link to all your friends and contacts who can then donate online to VIVA. Fundraising made easy!

Special Thanks

VIVA would also like to thank the following for their support in 2011:

- Maurice & Paula O'Reilly • Kilkenny Clinical Society
- Michael Horan • Oldcastle Vet Labs • North Connaught Clinical Club
- Dónal McLoone • Pat Kelleher • Séan Collins

Check out our website

Check out our website (www.viva.ie).

There, you can read about our projects, make a donation and register for regular email updates. Have a look!