

Rescue Rehomes Cats For Pest Control

The Working Cat Project of Central Kentucky helps rural property owners connect with natural mouse catchers.

"After the unexpected death of my sweet 14-month-old kitten, Jack, I needed to channel my energy into a project to honor his life," says Peyton Mashni, founder of the project. "I realized what Central Kentucky needed—a network of property owners willing to provide a haven for at-risk cats. The Working Cat Project was born. In June 2020, we became an official 501(c)(3) organization."

The project places feral or otherwise unhomed cats into safe barn homes. Property owners must provide shelter, food and water. In return, the cats help control the rodent population.

"Our cats come from unsafe outdoor living conditions and county shelters," Mashni says. "They're unsuitable for indoor living due to behavioral issues, litter box issues, or being feral due to little or negative human contact. Usually, county shelters can't help these cats,

and the outcome is grim. The Working Cat Project fills this need by adopting out these kitties to property owners."

These cats range from friendly to feral. They'll place kittens that have passed the window for socialization to become house pets. The project also facilitates Trap-Neuter-Return, allowing cats to stay in their original outdoor locations without adding to the cat overpopulation crisis.

Suitable homes need to be safe from hazards and far from heavy traffic. Owners are required to provide daily food, preferably on an elevated surface to deter raccoons, along with a small cat house or similar shelter.

Each rehomed cat must go through a mandatory 4-week confinement period in a kennel. Otherwise, they're likely to bolt in an attempt to track down their previous homes, a dangerous endeavor. The month-long confinement allows the cats to see that their new home is safe and provides ample food and water, making them more comfortable in the long run. At that point, they're ready

to become permanent pest control for the property.

As of April 2025, the organization has placed 645 cats into 302 barn homes.

"We've placed in Fayette, Madison, Jessamine, Woodford, Scott, Bourbon and Clark counties," Mashni says. "A few have made it to some of the most prestigious farms in Central Kentucky."

"It's been so rewarding getting to watch cats blossom at their new homes and see how much their new owners cherish them."

Still, she admits that the workload can get overwhelming.

"It's a challenge to juggle all this work on top of our full-time jobs; we do this on a volunteer basis."

While there are no set adoption fees, the project suggests a \$25 donation per cat to offset vet care and kenneling supplies. The project is currently seeking volunteers to trap cats, conduct community outreach, provide transportation, and assist with fundraising efforts.



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"You can save lives and reap the benefits of pest-free rodent control by adopting a working cat. It's a win-win."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, The Working Cat Project (info@workingcatprojectky.org; www.workingcatprojectky.org).

Training Plays Important Role With Hunting Dogs



"A champion retriever is a combination of breeding and training," says Thompson.

The first thing Tim Thompson learned when he bought his first hunting dog was that it needed training. After more than 30 years of breeding retrievers and winning trophies at national field trials, training is still key.

"I'd been in the field with poorly trained dogs, and it made for long days," recalls Thompson, co-owner of Mitimat Kennels. "I started out trying to train my dog and soon sought advice from professional trainers."

All the responses were similar.

"A guy is coming in from Canada. You need to talk to him."

Thompson met with him, and after the trainer looked over his dog, said he would take the dog. "I need him for three months," said the trainer.

"I've had dogs in training since then," says Thompson. "I've also participated in training and hope to do more. The training he gave my first dog also got me started competing in American Kennel Club (AKC) field trials."

Thompson maintains a busy schedule with a farm in Illinois, a pine tree farm in Georgia, and a career in the crop protection industry. With a co-owner's help, he also breeds pure-

bred labs and competes multiple times a year in field trials.

"A champion retriever is a combination of breeding and training," says Thompson. "We only breed when we're looking for the next set of field trial dogs. If we find a very good female, we try to get one or two litters from her to stock up for national competitions."

Thompson notes that it usually takes about 6 1/2 years for a dog to achieve field championship status, and they may compete until around age 10. One of the dogs he bred was an exception. Rock Paper Scissors, or Rocky, competed in his first national at age four. At 11, he was a finalist in the 2019 National Retriever Championship.

Training creates a seamless partnership between the dog and his handler. That partnership and the training are tested in the three-day AKC field trials.

"Trials can start with 100 dogs," says Thompson. "About 10% will finish."

He and his partner compete with their dogs when their schedules allow.

"Our dogs compete in 20 to 25 trials a year," says Thompson. "They live with the

trainer about 10 months out of the year. When they're home, they're treated like part of the family."

Typically, Thompson or his partner will fly in and work with the dog as much as possible before the field trial.

"It's a gift when you find a dog that knows his job and can get the job done, no matter who is driving the boat," he says.

Thompson is very clear that Mitimat Retrievers isn't about the money. He estimates that a puppy going to a field trial home can start at \$3,500, depending on genetics and the performance of its parents. But that's just the beginning of the investment.

"Early on, I thought I would get a dog, compete, breed her, and have a litter to offset the costs," he recalls with a laugh. "I quickly learned that it doesn't work that way. The hobby is for those with a passion and the time and resources to put the effort into it."

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Kefir Grains Offer Gut-Healthy Probiotics

Kefir might get less attention than yogurt, but this cultured milk product deserves more recognition. While a relatively new addition to North American grocery stores, kefir has been the fermented dairy beverage of choice across Central Asia for thousands of years. Kefir comes from the Turkish word "keyif," and it originated in the Caucasus Mountains of Eastern Europe.

Like cheese and yogurt, kefir is made by adding a starter culture to milk. The differences among the three lie in the types of bacteria or cultures and the amount of heat needed. Kefir depends on mesophilic bacteria, with each brand emphasizing different numbers and types of strains. This bacterium requires a lower fermentation temperature than yogurt, allowing for a wider variety of probiotics in the final product.

Kefir milk, water kefir, kefir grains and raw kefir are all components of the same product, although "grains" is somewhat of a misnomer. Kefir isn't a plant, but a gelatinous polysaccharide culture of bacteria and yeast known as kefiran.

Traditionally, kefir grains were placed in goat skin bags filled with milk. These bags were often hung in doorways so people walking by could prod them and speed up

fermentation. By nighttime, they'd turn the milk into a thin, yogurty drink. More milk was added once the kefir was consumed, continuing the cycle indefinitely.

Legend credits Prophet Muhammad with introducing kefir to the world. The people of the Caucasus Mountains managed to keep the grains a closely guarded secret for several centuries afterward. The fermented drink only entered global awareness through an elaborate Russian plot involving espionage and kidnapping, and it wasn't until 1908 that kefir began commercial production. Today, the drink is a dietary staple across Russia, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Kefir first appeared in American markets during the 1970s health food craze. Fans enjoy drinking it plain or mixing it into smoothies or granola. Its milk-like consistency makes kefir a great addition to baked goods like pancakes and muffins, and it even provides a pleasant tang as a sauce for savory dishes, like grilled meats.

The drink is considered an excellent source of probiotics. It's nutrient-rich, packed with protein, B vitamins, potassium and calcium. A cup of low-fat kefir typically has about 104 calories. Just watch the sugar content, as fruit-flavored kefir often contains added

sugar.

Goat's milk kefir boosts the nutritional benefits even further, offering around 18% more calcium, 43% more potassium, and 104% more vitamin A than cow's milk.

Some people believe kefir has healing powers, making it capable of helping with digestive problems, enhancing heart and bone health, and lowering the risk of osteoporosis. Similarly, the bacteria *Lactobacillus kefir*, found only in kefir, can slow or stop the growth of harmful bacteria, like *Salmonella*. There's also research suggesting that kefir can improve lactose digestion and reduce intolerance over time.

Making kefir at home is simple. All you need are kefir grains, which can be bought online or at health food stores, and a glass jar with about a cup of milk. Add a spoonful of grains and cover the jar with something that's not airtight (cheesecloth works well), then let it sit at room temperature for 24 hours to allow the milk to ferment. Strain out the grains with a sieve at the end, keeping them for the next batch. The grains should multiply each time you make a batch.

You can also make 100% lactose-free kefir using coconut water, fruit juice, and other non-dairy beverages. Just remember that



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kefir grains vary between dairy and nondairy drinks. When not being used, kefir grains can be stored submerged in fresh milk in the fridge for up to a month.