



Mars Inc. Donates \$2 Million for Human-Animal Interaction Research

A \$2 million commitment from Mars Inc. will fund research spanning four years that focuses on human-animal interaction.

By The SmallAnimalChannel News Division

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Funding from Mars Inc. will help The National Institute of Child Health and Development conduct a four-year study to reveal the significance of relationships between animals and people, especially animals and children.

The Waltham Center for Pet Nutrition, a division of Mars Inc., recently committed more than \$2 million to the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) for Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) research.

The NICHD, a division of the National Institutes of Health, will combine the donation with funding from the National Institute of Nursing Research to form what it says is the first formal program in HAI.

The donation will span four years and help fund NICHD studies in three areas:
the impact of human-animal interaction on typical development and health;
clinical trials that will focus on the role animals play in both physical and psychological therapeutic treatments;
the impact of animals on public health, including the cost-effectiveness of animals in reducing and preventing disease.

“NICHD is pleased to be able to support an expansion in HAI research,” said Peggy McCardle, Ph.D., chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch at NICHD. “Over the next four years, through our joint research initiative, we hope the scientific community will make great strides in understanding the significance of the relationships between animals and people — especially children. This information will inform how future generations decide how best to incorporate animals into their lives.”

The field of HAI research has been around for several decades, but previous studies have been small scale, observational or anecdotal, according to Mars Inc. This new research aims to provide concrete evidence on how children perceive, relate to and think about animals and how pets in the home affect children’s social and emotional development.

The company, based in McLean, Virginia, also said that research is needed on the effect of pets in the home on children’s health (e.g. allergies, the immune system, asthma and obesity), as well as on issues such as when and how parents select pets for their families/children and how best to prevent injury from pets.

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