

Rachael Ray Launches Contest for Pet Charities

More than \$200,000 is up for grabs in Ray's Mutt Madness Award Program for nonprofit animal organizations.

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Rachael Ray, here with dog Isaboo, will disburse \$200,000 in proceeds from her Nutrish line of pet foods to various nonprofit animal organizations. Rachael Ray is offering nonprofit animal organizations a chance to win some much-needed funding. The talk-show host and celebrity cook kicked off the first-ever Mutt Madness Award Program on Aug. 6. The program will serve as vehicle for Ray to disburse more than \$200,000 in proceeds she has received from the sale of her Rachael Ray Nutrish line of pet food and treats.

"We are so excited to launch Mutt Madness, which we know is going to be an amazing way to build awareness around the great people and organizations out there that do everything they can to protect and care for animals," Ray said in a statement announcing the contest.

Animal organizations have until Sept. 30 to enter the contest by filling out a questionnaire online. Only organizations that are registered 501(c)(3) charities and employ no-kill practices are eligible to compete.

A panel of judges will then select the top 64 organizations to face off in a March Madness style-competition. Panel members include Ray, actress Kathy Griffin; model and animal-rights activist Beth Ostrosky Stern; and veterinarian Dr. Peter Harris Kross.

Each of the 64 finalists will receive \$1,000 and chance to go to win more money.

Here is how it will work:

The 64 organizations will be randomly assigned spots in the Mutt Madness brackets. Visitors to Ray's website will then vote for which charity out of each of the 32 pairings they want to move onto the next level. At the end of round, the charities that received the most votes against their competitor will go on to the next round. Each time the charity advances, it will receive \$1,000.

The sixth and final round is the big prize money round, with the runner-up receiving \$25,000 and the winner receiving \$50,000 (that's on top of the money both charities won during the previous rounds).

The winner is expected to be announced in early December.

Ray teamed up with Ainsworth Pet Nutrition, a division of Dad's Pet Care in Meadville, Pa., last year to develop the Nutrish line. All the money she receives from the sale of the products goes to support Rachael's Rescue, which is dedicated to helping at-risk animals through adoption, medical care and education programs, along with training and outreach initiatives. To date, Ray has disbursed \$200,000 through Rachael's Rescue.