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Domestic Rabbit Guide Leader Supplement
Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service
4-H Club Bulletin
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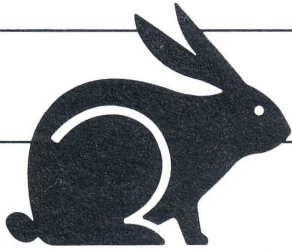
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Domestic Rabbit Guide

Leader Supplement





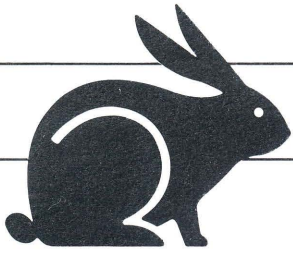
Domestic Rabbit Guide

Leader Supplement

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This publication was developed by the Michigan State 4-H Rabbit Developmental Committee. Information in it was drawn from the **4-H Rabbit Project Leader Guide** (4-H 149), by Sharon Ford, Middlesex County (Massachusetts) volunteer 4-H Leader, and Nancy Searle, Hampshire County (Massachusetts) 4-H Agent. It was designed by Marian Reiter, 4-H Graphic Artist, and edited by Rebecca McKee, 4-H Publications Editor.



Introduction

This leader's supplement to the **Domestic Rabbit Guide** (4-H 1313) is designed to assist leaders in planning activities and programs associated with the 4-H rabbit project. It provides general information about the 4-H program and offers things to do and discuss related to the **Domestic Rabbit Guide**.

Goals of 4-H

The goals of 4-H include helping boys and girls develop character and effective leadership and citizenship skills. Club activities that are planned and conducted by the members provide real-life laboratories in leadership and citizenship development. 4-H opens the door to expanded horizons through county, state, national and international activities for members.

The 4-H philosophy is "learning by doing." The 4-H animal science projects are good examples of that philosophy. By caring for and training an animal, members learn patience, responsibility, initiative and dependability. They also learn to set goals and develop standards for themselves.

This guide is designed to stimulate ideas and to provide a general framework for your 4-H club's annual program. In the final analysis, your judgment of the needs and interests of the club members will determine the specific topics to be included in each meeting, and in your club's annual program.

Working with Young People

Each 4-H member has needs, interests, desires, strengths and weaknesses which make him or her unique. While each member is different, all youths share some common needs. They want to belong and to achieve, and they are active and want new experiences. They also want to be independent, and they crave love and affection.

The Leader's Role

The 4-H leader has many roles. The three main ones are organizer, counselor and teacher. As an organizer, the 4-H club leader:

- Forms a club and enrolls club members.
- Secures project resources.
- Works with club officers to plan the club's annual program.
- Keeps members informed of 4-H events and activities and encourages their participation.
- Involves parents in the club.
- Serves as the club liaison between the county Cooperative Extension Service office and state programs.

As a counselor the 4-H club leader:

- Helps members and parents in choosing projects.
- Helps club officers plan and conduct meetings.
- Guides committee members who are planning club activities and special projects.
- Counsels teen leaders and explains their duties.

- Helps members see how they can become active in improving their community.

- Encourages record-keeping and keeps abreast of available awards.

As a teacher the 4-H club leader:

- Teaches subject matter in the **Domestic Rabbit Guide** and other resources.
- Keeps abreast of developments in the project field.
- Helps members plan and present demonstrations.
- Conducts tours and other club events to reinforce teaching efforts.
- Sets an example that teaches such values and behaviors as punctuality, responsibility, respect for others and the dignity of work.

Leadership in a 4-H club is a shared experience. You, the members and everyone concerned will benefit if everyone shares leadership responsibilities. The members of the leadership team may include community coordinators, teen leaders, parents, resource leaders and Extension 4-H staff. Everyone has something to offer that will enhance the total program; the key is getting them involved.

One thing to remember when inviting others to participate is to involve them in a role they feel comfortable with. If a parent is noted for her culinary skills, ask her for help with teaching kids to plan and cook nutritious meals featuring rabbit. If she is good at woodworking, she could help the members build rabbit cages and nest boxes.

Another parent might be a whiz in veterinary science. He could quiz the members on rabbit health and breeding. If the parents' first experiences are good and they feel they have helped the program, they'll probably be pleased to work with the club again. If the initial experience was unpleasant, parents may not want to work with the club on any other projects. Whatever the result, a letter of thanks from the club helps volunteers feel appreciated and helps assure their continued participation.

Project Objectives

The 4-H rabbit project is designed to help 4-H'ers:

- Develop leadership, initiative, self-reliance, sportsmanship and other valuable character traits.
- Experience the pride and responsibility of owning an animal.
- Learn about the care, feeding, management and related expenses of owning animals.
- Appreciate rabbit meat as a food source.
- Gain an appreciation for the role of animals in everyday life.
- Increase their knowledge of safety precautions to prevent injuries to themselves, to others and to their rabbits.
- Prepare for their citizenship responsibilities by working together in groups and supporting community projects and activities.

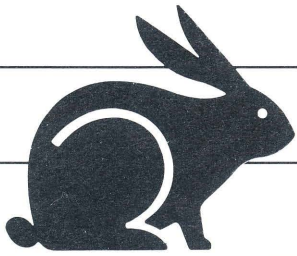
More young people become interested in 4-H rabbit projects each year. They are discovering the satisfaction and pleasure that activities with rabbits can bring them.

The rabbit project is interesting and well-suited to 4-H. It provides an opportunity for members to learn by doing, to acquire healthy living habits, to participate in group activities and to obtain information and direction in the use of their leisure time.

Planning a Club Program

Each club should have an annual program with educational, social and recreation experiences for members. People in rabbit-related careers, such as veterinarians, breeders, laboratory animal technicians, medical researchers and show judges could speak to the club. A 4-H Awareness Team could plan and conduct workshops on rabbit meat as a low-cost protein source for low income families. This could be a community service project and a club program.

Your club program could also encourage club members to participate in rabbit-related events like Rabbit Expo, the 4-H Exploration Days rabbit options, 4-H mall and county fair shows, and 4-H rabbit workshops. Your own experiences and imagination will be helpful in developing a meaningful program. Ask your club officers to help you develop the club program. It will make your job easier and they'll enjoy the decision-making role.



Suggested Meeting Topics

The program guide that follows is essentially a list of topics taken from the **Domestic Rabbit Guide**. There are several discussion and activity ideas under each major topic. The ideas listed are only suggestions for your club meetings and activities. There are many other ideas you will be able to add to this list yourself. The page number after each topic refers to the appropriate information in the **Domestic Rabbit Guide**.

Choosing a Breed (Page 1)

Things to Discuss

- Reasons to raise rabbits. Explain why you want to raise rabbits—for their meat or fur, or to show?
- The size rabbit that is best for you.
- The best rabbit breeds for meat production.
- Describe your favorite rabbit breed.

Things to Do

- Collect rabbit breed pictures.
- Attend a rabbit show and list all the breeds being shown there.
- Watch **Rabbit Breeds** (4H0584), a slide-tape that describes the different breeds and varieties of rabbits. (It can be scheduled through your county Cooperative Extension Service office).
- Read about breeds in the **Standard of Perfection** and specialty club publications.

- Talk to breeders about the advantages and disadvantages of your breed of rabbits.

Selecting Foundation Stock (Page 2)

Things to Discuss

- How to select breeding stock.
- What to look for in a rabbitry when purchasing stock.
- How to bring new rabbits into your herd.
- Factors affecting raising your own replacement stock.

Things to Do

- Visit a breeder and discuss his/her stock selection methods.
- Listen to breed class judging at a rabbit show.
- Use the **Standard of Perfection** to detail faults and problems to watch out for in your breed.

Housing and Equipment (Pages 4 to 6)

Things to Discuss

- Basic housing and the equipment necessary to start raising rabbits.
- The type of housing best suited to your breed and situation.
- The size of cages your rabbits require.
- The best location for rabbit pens.
- Compare homemade and commercial equipment.

- The kinds of wire that are best for building rabbit pens.
- Compare types of feeders and waterers.
- Types and sizes of nest boxes.
- Carrying cases.

Things to Do

- Visit other members' rabbitries and discuss their setups.
- Visit a commercial rabbitry and observe the setup.
- Visit a rabbitry supplier.
- Build some of your own equipment.

Feeding (Page 9)

Things to Discuss

- Why water is important to your rabbits.
- Self-feeding and hand-feeding.
- When to use full and restricted feeding.
- Factors affecting how much you feed your rabbits.
- The feeds that make up a complete ration.
- Feeding variations.

Things to Do

- Visit feed stores and feed mills.
- Compare the nutrient content of different brands of rabbit feed.
- Invite feed company representatives to speak on rabbit nutrition.

Breeding (Page 10)

Things to Discuss

- Outcrossing and line-breeding.
- How age and size relate to breeding readiness.
- Signs of readiness for mating.
- Proper mating procedures.
- The four breeding methods and their advantages and disadvantages.

Things to Do

- Observe rabbits breeding.
- Breed club members' rabbits.
- Invite local breeders to discuss their breeding programs.
- Make nest boxes.

Palpation (Page 12)

Things to Discuss

- What is palpation?
- The parts of the doe reproductive system.
- The functions of the parts of the rabbit reproductive system.
- Locate and identify the parts of the rabbit reproductive system.
- Palpation techniques.
- Distinguish between a rabbit fetus (baby) and a fecal ball.

Things to Do

- Watch a palpation demonstration.
- Palpate a doe that is 14 days pregnant and a nonpregnant doe.

Gestation and Kindling (Page 14)

Things to Discuss

- Kindling.
- Normal gestation period.
- Signs of false pregnancy.
- How to prepare a nest box.
- When to put a nest box in the pen.
- Result of disturbing newly kindled does.
- How does prepare their nest boxes.
- Describe newly born rabbits.
- Nest box eye infection and treatment.
- Reasons to breed more than one doe at a time.
- Methods for switching a baby rabbit to a new mother.

Things to Do

- Observe rabbits in all stages of development.

Gestation and Kindling Problems (Page 15)

Things to Discuss

- Needs of pregnant does.
- How to identify, treat and prevent ketosis.
- Abortion causes and prevention.
- Care and prevention of dystocia.
- Consequences of poor maternal qualities.
- When to remove the nest box.

Things to Do

- Discuss kindling problems with a veterinarian or rabbit producer.

Breeding and Weaning Schedule (Page 15)

Things to Discuss

- Rebreeding and weaning time options.
- Benefits and problems associated with the options.

Things to Do

- Map out a calendar year breeding schedule for a doe.

Tattooing (Page 16)

Things to Discuss

- Reasons to tattoo rabbits.
- Tools to use.
- How to tattoo.

Things to Do

- Watch a rabbit being tattooed.
- Invite a breeder to demonstrate tattooing.
- Have your rabbits tattooed or learn to do it yourself.

Sexing Young Rabbits (Page 17)

Things to Discuss

- Procedure and technique for identifying the sex of your rabbits.

Things to Do

- Watch rabbits being sexed.
- Practice sexing rabbits.

Breeding Problems (Page 17)

Things to Discuss

- Reasons for no live births.
- Reasons for refusal to mate.
- Reasons for failure to conceive.
- Breeding options.

Things to Do

- Chart the breeding results of an older (age 1 and over) and younger (age 5 to 7 months) buck. Compare the breeding records.
- Chart summer temperatures to see if there is any correlation between several days of temperatures of 85°F or higher and breeding failures in your herd.

Disease Control (Page 17)

Things to Discuss

- Major factors in preventing disease.
- Reasons why cleanliness is important in preventing disease outbreaks.
- How population density is related to disease outbreaks.
- How culling helps prevent disease.

Things to Do

- Have a veterinarian speak on disease prevention.
- Observe and compare the cleanliness and general health of the stock at several rabbitries.

Medication (Page 18)

Things to Discuss

- When and how to use medications.

Things to Do

- Design and stock a first-aid kit for your rabbitry.

Pest Control and Sanitation (Page 19)

Things to Discuss

- Problems other animals may bring into the rabbitry.
- Fly control.
- Fertilizer value of rabbit droppings.
- Waste removal from cages.
- Disinfection of materials and equipment.

Things to Do

- Observe ways other rabbitries keep animals away from their rabbits.
- Advertise rabbit manure for sale.

Handling Rabbits (Page 20)

Things to Discuss

- The benefits of handling your rabbits often, beginning at an early age.
- The consequences of improper handling.
- How to pose a rabbit.

Things to Do

- Demonstrate proper handling and posing of live rabbits.
- Attend a rabbit show and observe the judges' handling techniques.
- Evaluate rabbits, checking teeth, sex, tail, legs, etc., for disqualifications.

Home Processing (Page 22)

Things to Discuss

- The steps in processing a rabbit.
- The importance of sanitation in processing.
- Rabbit skins as by-products.

Things to Do

- Demonstrate how to process and cut up a rabbit.
- Visit a local breeder who processes his or her own animals.

Tanning (Page 25)

Things to Discuss

- The tanning process.
- Safe chemical handling.

Things to Do

- Ask an experienced tanner to explain and demonstrate the craft.
- Process one or more skins.

Rabbit Cookery (Page 26)

Things to Discuss

- How to prepare rabbit meat for food.

- Compare rabbit meat to other meats. Consider calories and the percentages of protein, fat and moisture in the meat.

Things to Do

- Assemble a club rabbit cookbook using the members' favorite family rabbit recipes.
- Hold a rabbit meat identification challenge. Make two batches of the same recipe, using chicken for one batch and rabbit for the other.
- Have a family potluck supper. Have each family bring their favorite rabbit dish.

Animal Evaluation (Page 27)

Things to Discuss

- The five rabbit body types and how they are unique.
- The ideal commercial rabbit body type.
- How to decide which animals to keep.
- Culling for disqualifications and eliminations.

Things to Do

- Compare the five body types.
- Decide the body type your rabbit breed has. Compare the animals to the body type descriptions in the **Standard of Perfection**. List the animals' strengths and weaknesses.
- Visit members with one or more litters that are ready to wean. Select the rabbits which should be kept. Give reasons for your selection.
- Have a rabbit judge demonstrate and explain his/her method of evaluating rabbits.

Picking Potential Show Animals (Page 29)

Things to Discuss

- The relationship of body width and depth to body length for good balance.
- The evolution of the judging system and reasons why it has changed.
- Review disqualifications, eliminations and faults.

Things to Do

- Evaluate a class of animals, taking into consideration their depth, width and overall balance.
- Ask a judge to place one or more rabbit classes and explain his/her reasons.
- Evaluate a class using each method (measuring, points and comparison).

Preparing Rabbits for Show (Page 30)

Things to Discuss

- The relationship of proper feeding to developing good show stock.
- Supplemental feeds and their usage.
- Preshow grooming and handling techniques.
- The importance of showing a rabbit in its natural state.

Things to Do

- Divide a newly weaned litter into two groups. Feed one group its normal ration plus a supplement. Feed

the second group its normal ration. Record and compare the results after 3 weeks.

- Demonstrate and practice posing your rabbits.
- Demonstrate and practice rabbit grooming.
- Divide a rabbit litter into two groups. Groom one group each day for a week. Compare them to the ungroomed group.

Entering Rabbits in a Show (Page 30)

Things to Discuss

- Age and weight classifications.
- Placement procedures.
- Procedures for judging breeds with more than one variety.
- Procedures for determining the top animals in a show.
- The information necessary on an entry blank.

Things to Do

- Practice filling out a show entry form.
- Attend a rabbit show. Observe how the animals are placed.
- Enter a rabbit show.
- Hold a club fun show.

Show Remark Cards (Page 31)

Things to Discuss

- Different parts of the show card.
- Why it is important to enter each animal properly.

Things to Do

- Practice filling out show cards.
- Practice filling out the remarks section as the judge is speaking.
- Act as a recorder for a show judge by filling out show remark cards.

Record-Keeping (Page 32)

Things to Discuss

- The reasons for keeping records.
- Types of records.
- The importance of knowing your rabbit's pedigree.
- How to register a rabbit.

Things to Do

- Practice filling out pedigrees.
- Practice filling out buck and doe record cards.
- Examine the pedigree of a colored rabbit and see what colors are in its ancestry.

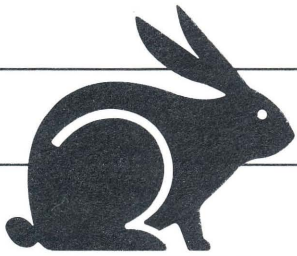
4-H Record-Keeping

Things to Discuss

- **Member's Personal 4-H Record Book** (4-H 1192) and **4-H Member's Achievement Summary** (410A).
- Awards available to 4-H rabbit project members.

Things to Do

- Practice filling out 4-H records.
- Hold a special record-keeping meeting. Invite a past project winner or your county 4-H staff to speak.
- Establish a club recognition program for members who complete and submit their project records.
- Recognize members who receive county or state awards at a special club meeting.



The following is a selection of books and other resources that can provide additional information for the 4-H rabbit project. The books may be available at school and public libraries. For more information on the 4-H rabbit project contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office or the Extension 4-H Rabbit Specialist, 113 Anthony Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Check the "Rabbits" section of the **Guide to Michigan 4-H Youth Programs** for other resources. The guide is an annotated listing of the educational materials available in each Michigan 4-H project area. It is available at your county CES office.

4-H Publications

The following 4-H publications are available from your county Cooperative Extension Service office.

Rabbit Fitting and Showmanship Member's Guide (4-H 1268)—This 6-page bulletin contains objectives and guidelines for 4-H participants in rabbit fitting and showing contests. It includes information on feeding and care, grooming and conditioning. The bulletin includes a rabbit showmanship scorecard and provides step-by-step instructions with illustrations for completing the contest examination. (1986)

Rabbit Fitting and Showmanship Leader Supplement (4-H 1269)—This 2-page supplement covers how to organize and conduct a rabbit fitting and showing contest, materials needed and details for the fair book. A detailed breakdown of the contest scorecard is presented, along with a scorecard worksheet for a 4-H rabbit contest. (1986)

4-H Audiovisual Materials

The following 4-H audiovisual materials can be scheduled through your county Cooperative Extension Service office.

Michigan 4-H Rabbit Activities (4H0439)—This slide set describes the different Michigan 4-H rabbit activities in which members can get involved. A script is included. (1985)

Rabbit Breeds (4H0584)—Different breeds and varieties of rabbits are presented in this slide-tape. A script is included. (1984)

Rabbit Diseases (4H0725)—This 10-minute slide-tape explores common infectious and noninfectious rabbit diseases that a 4-H rabbit raiser might encounter. A script is included. (1986)

Rabbit Showmanship (4H0480)—Sam Varghese, Extension 4-H rabbit specialist, demonstrates the steps of rabbit fitting and showing in this slide program. A script is included. (1983)

Rabbitries (4H0726)—This 10-minute slide program illustrates different types of rabbit housing. A script is included. (1984)

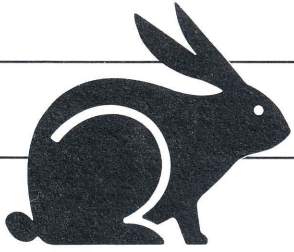
Rabbitry Management and Records (4H0676)—This program provides a question and answer format in five rabbit project categories: getting started, housing, feeding, breeding, and handling and care. It is written for use with an IBM computer and includes a user guide. (1986)

Other Resources

▪ **A Progressive Program for Raising Better Rabbits and Cavies.** American Rabbit Breeders Association, Inc. Bloomington, Ill., 1984

▪ **Standard of Perfection: 1986-1990 Edition.** American Rabbit Breeders Association, Inc. Bloomington, Ill., 1986.

▪ **Rabbit Production** (6th edition). Cheeke, Peter R., Nephi M. Patton, Steven D. Lukefahr and James I. McNitt. Danville, Ill.: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1987.



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