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Cover Illustration: The pride of ownership is displayed by Gary Douris, 13, second year 4-H Club member from Salem.  
(Photo by I. F. Bishop)
RABBIT PROJECT

Starting A Rabbit Project

Purpose
Your 4-H rabbit project provides an opportunity for you:
★ To learn how to select and raise good rabbits.
★ To accept responsibility by having a live animal of your own to care for regularly.
★ To develop business ability by having a business of your own.
★ To learn how to keep and use records.
★ To learn how animals live and produce their young.

Advantages
Rabbits make a desirable project for many boys and girls:
★ Rabbits do well in Oregon because the climate is reasonably cool and uniform.
Rabbits can be raised in back yards because little space is required.
Rabbits reproduce and grow rapidly. You can learn about all phases of livestock production in one year.
It does not take much money to get started raising rabbits.
Rabbits can be handled by boys and girls who may be too small to handle larger animals.
You can make a fair profit on rabbits if you have good rabbits and do a good job of raising and marketing them.
You can build most of the equipment you will need with the guidance of your parents or Club leader.

Requirements
To be a 4-H Rabbit Club member in Oregon you must:
- Be nine years old and have not reached your twenty-first birthday before January 1 of the Club year.
- Own at least one doe.
- Care for your rabbits and do most of the work yourself.
- Get your rabbits by May 1 and start your 4-H project. After your first year, your rabbit project should continue the year around.
- Fill out your Project Record Card and give it to your Club Leader or send to your County Agent when you get your rabbits and start your project.
- Keep a record of your rabbit project in a 4-H Livestock record book. An up-to-date record book must accompany your rabbit exhibit at your County Fair or the State Fair. The records should start when you get your first rabbits and should continue until the end of the Club year. Give your completed record to your Club leader or send it to your County Agent.

Needs
Before you start a rabbit project you should make certain of the following:
- That you will have plenty of feed and suitable hutchies for your rabbits.
- That you have money available for the purchase of rabbits, equipment, and feed.
- That your daily schedule will allow you ample time to care for rabbits.
That if you raise more rabbits than your family will eat you will have a market for them.

That if you live in a town, there is no law to prevent the raising of rabbits inside the city limits.

That if you have close neighbors, you ask them before you buy your rabbits if it is all right with them for you to raise rabbits.

That you will have a place for your rabbit hutches where stray dogs and predators will not bother them.

Opportunities

As a 4-H Rabbit Club member, you will have an opportunity to do the following:

Join a club. Belong to a 4-H Rabbit or Livestock Club with other boys and girls.

Judge. Learn how to judge rabbits and perhaps be on your club's rabbit judging team.

Demonstrate. Learn how to tell and show your fellow Club members how to do or make something. Work up a demonstration with one of your Club mates to present at Club or community meetings. Enter the demonstration contest at your County Fair.

Show livestock. Groom and train your rabbits and enter the Rabbit Showmanship Contest at your County Fair. Study the information on Rabbit Showmanship in the back of this bulletin.

Take tours. Attend Livestock and Crops Tours or special Rabbit Tours whenever you have the opportunity.

Be thrifty. Do not pay too much for your rabbits. Do not pay high prices for prepared feeds when you have home-grown feeds that are just as good when properly mixed.

Feed livestock. Learn how to mix a balanced ration and how to feed for rapid economical gains.

Be kind. Be kind to your rabbits. Teach them to trust and respect you.

Manage livestock. Make your animals comfortable. Be sure they have shade, fresh water, salt, and freedom from insects and other pests that might bother them.

Attend camps. As a 4-H member you may have an opportunity to attend 4-H Camps held in your County.
Go to 4-H Summer School. When you are twelve years old, if you have done a good job in your rabbit project, you may earn the opportunity to attend 4-H Club Summer School at Oregon State College.

Exhibit. As a Club member, you will be able to exhibit your rabbits in 4-H Club classes at your community shows, your County Fair, and if your rabbits are good enough, perhaps at the State Fair.

Housing and Equipment

The hutch

Before you get a rabbit, you should have a home for it. Several things you should consider in building the rabbit's home are:

- The hutch should keep the rabbit dry. A good roof and three sides solid with the open side away from the wind will provide a dry place.
- The hutch should be easy to keep clean.

Take advantage of windbreaks when you can. Provide shade in summer by locating the hutch in a shady spot.
Hutch constructed entirely of wire. Note how the feeders are placed, the way the side opens for a door, and the metal pan under the upper cage which diverts the droppings and urine to the back so that they do not fall on rabbits in lower hutch.

Simple, 1-tier hutch with hay rack between compartments.
Three-tier hutch with front as door—usable for inside or outside.

Nest box arranged for young bunnies.

Nest box arranged for older bunnies.
Convenience in feeding and care of the rabbits is important. Breeding does need one square foot of hutch space per pound of live rabbit. New Zealand does would need 10 to 12 square feet of hutch space for each doe and litter. Smaller breeds need less and larger breeds need more space.

Locate the hutch so that it has the advantage of any windbreaks.

You need not put a lot of money into expensive hutches, but you should not try to raise rabbits in old boxes, orange crates, etc.

The nest box

Apple boxes or nail kegs may be used.

Best to have box with low side near wall when bunnies are little and turn box around when they are big enough to get out.

Other equipment

Crock useful for water containers and for grain or pellet feeding.

Scraper useful for cleaning

Carrying or shipping crate

Selecting Rabbits

Choosing the breed

Study the different breeds of rabbits carefully before you decide which breed you want to raise.

The meat breeds will produce more meat to eat or sell.

Two leading breeds of meat rabbits are:

New Zealand White and Californian.

Weight classes for showing the New Zealand White:

Seniors—over 8 months, bucks 9 to 11 pounds, does 10 to 12 pounds;

Intermediates—5 to 8 months, bucks 8 to 10 pounds, does 8 to 11 pounds;

Juniors—Under 5 months and up to 8 pounds.
WEIGHT CLASSES FOR SHOWING CALIFORNIAN:

Seniors—over 8 months, bucks 8 to 10 pounds, does 8½ to 10½ pounds

Intermediates—5 to 8 months, bucks 8 to 9 and does 8 to 9½ pounds.

Juniors—under 5 months and not over 8 pounds.
Selecting your rabbits

► Your rabbits should be free from defects or diseases. Do not buy a rabbit with a wry tail, rupture, buck teeth, flop ears, crooked legs or bad eyes. These defects may be inherited; their young might have them too. Such conditions as ear canker, snuffles, sore hock, scours (dirty rears), vents disease, bloat, and others may be due to harmful bacteria (germs). If these diseases are brought to your place they are apt to spread to other rabbits.

► Meat rabbits should be well developed in the important parts; the hind legs, hips, and loin.

► It is usually best for a 4-H member to have only one breed.

► Buy from a good rabbit breeder near your home. Tell him what you want your rabbits for and ask him to help you pick out good ones.

► Ask your club leader or your County Extension Agent for advice if you need help.

► The rabbits you choose should be out of a big litter or if an adult it should be producing big litters.

► Young rabbits should be big for their age. New Zealands and Californians should weigh 4 to 4½ pounds each at 8 weeks of age.

► Meat rabbits should be of good type and conformation and should carry plenty of natural fleshing.

► Health and vigor are very important.

Avoid these weaknesses in your breeding stock. (Left) Rough shoulders and weak back. (Right) Bony hips.
Improper meeting of the teeth, called malocclusion, in the rabbit. Skull at left from normal rabbit; on right, from one in which wear is not proper. Teeth at the top grow up and into mouth while lower teeth grow out like daggers.

Rabbit with buck teeth.

Rabbit with crooked right hind leg.

"Flop" ears in rabbits are due to improper handling or a genetic weakness of ear attachment.
Handling Rabbits

- Pick up big rabbits by the skin of the back just behind the shoulders. It is best to have ears in the grasp with the skin in the right place rather than too far back. With the other hand you can support most of the rabbit’s weight.

- Hold your rabbit so it can not scratch you.

- Young rabbits for slaughter should be picked up by the loin rather than by skin over the back. This prevents bruised appearing carcasses, due to breaking some small blood vessels, which happens when rabbits are picked up by the skin over back.

Methods of handling rabbits. (Upper left) Holding rabbit so that weight falls on rump rather than on loose skin over the back. (Above) Carrying a rabbit. (Left) Picking up young rabbit prior to slaughter.
A homemade cage for carrying rabbits.
Rabbit Feeding

The objective in feeding is to provide the necessary food in the proper amounts and proportions:

- The rabbit needs:
  
  **Proteins** for bone and muscle growth and for the production of milk
  
  **Minerals** (calcium, phosphorus, salt and iodine) also for bone and muscle growth and for the production of milk
  
  **Carbohydrates** (starches found in grain) and **fats** (also found in grains and oil meal) to supply energy for exercise, and for fattening and milk production
  
  **Vitamin A** for reproduction and growth
  
  **Vitamin D** for proper bone development

- The best way to supply what the rabbit needs:
  
  **Proteins**—good quality legume (clover or alfalfa) hay or soybean, linseed (from flax seed), cotton seed or peanut oil meals
  
  **Minerals**—Calcium is usually supplied by good legume hay. Phosphorus is furnished by the grains and oil meals if the plants were grown on fertile soil. Salt and iodine are supplied by iodized salt, in the feed, in trays as loose salt or as salt spools. Calcium and phosphorus may be supplied with a mixture of equal parts steamed bonemeal and ground limestone.
  
  **Carbohydrates and fats** are supplied by feeding cereal grains such as barley, wheat, corn and oats. Cracked or rolled grains mix better with the oil meals than whole grains.
  
  **Vitamin A** is supplied by yellow corn, good green, leafy legume hay or carrots.
  
  **Vitamin D** is supplied by sunlight on the rabbit or by sun-cured hays. Irradiated yeast may also be used.

- Does and litters need all the feed they will eat with plenty of concentrates (grains and oil meals) as well as good green, leafy legume hay.

A good ration to self-feed does and litters:

- Barley, oats or corn (part may be wheat) 3 pounds (cracked or rolled)
- Soybean meal 1 pound

Plus all the good, green leafy alfalfa or clover hay they will eat.
Don't feed very much green feed to does and litters. Use these feeds for dry does and bucks. Young rabbits may eat so much green feed that they become sick and still not get enough to get fat.

Use of pellets may be more convenient if you live in town than grain and hay. If possible one should feed pellets composed largely of hay to dry does and bucks and grain pellets plus hay pellets to does and litters.

Clean, fresh water in a clean container should be provided each hutch at all times.

Usually you feed and water in the morning and check the feed and water containers in the evening.

Be regular in time of feeding and have enough time so you can do the job right.

Dry does and bucks need only good quality legume hay with little or no grain.

**Keeping and Using Records**

One Rabbit Production Record Card should be kept on the hutch for each breeding doe and a second card should be kept in your 4-H Record Book where it won't get dirty, torn, or lost.
**Oregon 4-H Club—Rabbit Production Record Card**

Name or No. of doe: **Beggy**

Birth date: **July 4, 1952**  
Number in litter: **6**  
Weight at 56 days: **4.40**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Litter Number</th>
<th>Date Bred</th>
<th>Date Due</th>
<th>Date Kindled</th>
<th>Number Born</th>
<th>56 Day Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/14/53</td>
<td>3/16/53</td>
<td>3/17/53</td>
<td>7 Live, 1 Dead</td>
<td>2/2/53 7 Live, 29 1/2 4.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6/16/53 - Yave Beggy 2 baby rabbits from Josephine's litter.

Remarks on other side
You can get extra Record Cards from your 4-H Club leader or your County Agent's office. Keep these up to the minute rather than "put off" entering something.

Tattoo in ear of rabbit. "D" is code letter for year 1953; "2" indicates second rabbit born that year.

Keep your breeding rabbits properly marked. A tattoo is the best way to do this.

You will be furnished a 4-H Club Member's Easy to Keep Livestock Record Book. Keep this accurately and up-to-date.

You may want to keep a record of feed eaten and value of young produced from each doe so you can find the profitable does and get rid of those that aren't.

You will want to have a scale or to be able to borrow one for weighing the rabbits. A milk scale or bathroom scale will do.
Rabbit Breeding

- The age to first breed a doe depends on her size more than her age. New Zealand does weighing 7 to 8 pounds may be bred.

- Always take the doe to the buck’s hutch for breeding so the buck will direct his attention to the doe rather than investigating the strange hutch.

- Make a record of each breeding or kindling promptly. Remember the Chinese saying “Faintest record is worth more than fondest memory.”

- Check doe 18 days after breeding to see if she is pregnant by taking her to the buck. If she doesn’t accept him, the chances are that she is pregnant. Some does may take the buck when they are pregnant so you should have nest box ready 28 days after the first breeding.

- The time from breeding until the young are born (gestation) is 30 to 32 days. It is best to have the hutch clean and the nest box in by the 28th day after breeding.

- Be quiet when working with your rabbits at kindling time and keep strange dogs and cats away as excited does may kill their young.

- Litter size (number of young) varies. It is best to breed so two or three does will kindle at the same time so you can adjust litter size by putting some young from large litters with does having small litters. This can be done one or two days after kindling.

- Eight young per litter is usually all one should allow the doe to nurse. Small young may be destroyed and give the bigger ones a better chance.

- Never let does raising young run with other rabbits. The doe should have a hutch of her own when raising her young.

- Wean and market surplus young at about 8 weeks of age.

- Separate young males from young females at weaning time. You can tell does from the bucks by pulling back the external reproduction organs. One sees a slit in females and a circle in the males. After about 6 months of age the testicles will show on the males so you should have no trouble telling the sex of rabbits then.
Marketing Rabbits

The profit you make with rabbits may depend as much on your ability to market properly as upon your ability to feed and raise rabbits.

Butcher types: (left) ideal butcher rabbit with deep body, smooth hip, plump leg, and full loin; (right) common butcher rabbit with long shallow body, bony hip, narrow loin, pinched heart, and lack of fullness in the leg.

In the carcass on the left from the ideal butcher rabbit, note the full loin and leg and fleshing over bony prominences. In the carcass on the right from the common butcher rabbit, note narrow loin, lack of fullness in the legs, and prominent bones.
Selling live rabbits for market

The best help in marketing rabbits is to produce the kind of rabbits the buyer wants. Friers weighing 4 to 4½ pounds each that are plump, fat, and healthy are always desirable.

Try to build up a trade with someone who butchers rabbits who will take your surplus at weaning because it is expensive to wean and feed little bunnies.

Have your rabbits fat. Thin rabbits won’t make a good appearance at the dinner table. To do this you must feed your doe and her young regularly and the right kind of feed.

Rabbit butchering

You may want to butcher your rabbits to sell to a meat market or to your neighbors or keep for home use. Remember that you should try to build up a trade by selling only good dressed rabbits.

The procedure to dress rabbits

1. Hang rabbit by one hind leg and remove head with sharp knife.
2. Remove front feet and free hind leg with pruning shears.
3. Skin rabbit by slitting down inside of rear legs and after skinning them and cutting off tail pull skin over body downward. Be careful not to pull meat off with skin. Work front legs out and pull skin off.
4. Split carcass down front, cut around bung, pull intestines down and remove. Leave kidneys in and save the liver, after the gall bladder is removed.

Method of handling rabbit and cutting off head. This method allows quick bleeding. It is as humane as stunning first provided the head is removed quickly.
Method of cutting up rabbit for market.

Left: Dorsal view of live rabbit.

Left: Dressed rabbit.

Left: Cut-up carcass, showing where parts come from.

Below: Rabbit cut up and packaged for marketing.
5. Remove the heart and lungs. Save the heart.
6. Cut off leg that has been holding rabbit.
7. Wash rabbit thoroughly.
8. Stretch skin over wire.
9. Tie hind legs and put carcass in right position to cool so a pleasant shape will result.
10. Most buyers want their rabbits cut up.
11. Put cut-up rabbit in paraffined carton or wrap in aluminum foil.

Method of stretching rabbit skins.

University of California Photo
Selling Breeding Stock

- The selling of breeding stock is a business in itself. It requires a reputation that is built up through constructive breeding and honest dealings.
- Never sell breeding stock that is not good enough to use in your own herd.
- Always make good any promise.
- Animals that prove unproductive should be cheerfully replaced by other breeding stock.
- Try to help others to take care of their animals so they will be productive.
- Don't sell breeding stock to a child before he is ready for the animal.
- Help the boy or girl who doesn't know rabbits select a good rabbit even if you have to get it from someone else.

Home Use of Rabbits

- You may be helpful in providing some of the food for your family by using some of your rabbits at home. You should figure the value of rabbits used at home and enter this as income in your record book.
- You will learn more from your rabbit project if you operate as a business of your own. You should buy your feed, rabbits, and equipment and sell your market rabbits produced to your parents or others. This is better than for the parent to furnish everything and take all or most of the returns.

Rabbit Showmanship Guide

Fitting for show

*Feed.* Feed your rabbits just as you would for market or for breeding. They should be in good flesh but not too fat. Market rabbits should weigh four to five pounds.

*Breeding.* A producing doe should have regained her normal weight in two or three weeks after weaning her litter. She may be up to two weeks pregnant when shown. Breed your doe to kindle 10 to 12 weeks before she is to be shown—she can be taken from her young and rebred two weeks before the show. Her young will be just about right for the market...
class. Young from her previous litter will be just about right to show in the junior class and young from her preceding litter in the intermediate class.

Breed your doe to kindle early in January, April, and about the first of July and you should have rabbits to exhibit in the intermediate, junior, and market classes—plus producing doe in the mature doe class.

Cleanliness. The best way to keep your rabbit clean is to keep it in a clean hutch by itself.

Trim. Trim the toenails several weeks before the fair if they are too long.

Training

- Always be quiet and gentle with your rabbits.
- Handle them carefully so you will not hurt or scare them. Never lift a rabbit by its ears or the skin on its back. Always carry its weight on your hand placed under its rump.
- Work with your rabbits a few minutes each day until they become gentle.
- Practice posing your rabbit as you would for a show. Teach your rabbit to stay where you place it.

Positioning rabbit on table for show.
Have your father or mother or someone else feel of your rabbit while you have it posed; so that it will get used to a judge handling it.

You can turn your rabbit from side to side by placing your hands on either side of the rabbit and pivoting it on the table.

**Care at the fair**

- You may want to make a carrying box for your rabbit. See page 14.
- Do not allow your rabbit to become wet, windblown, or overheated while taking it to the fair. Be sure that its box is well ventilated.
- If you are to be responsible for its care at the fair, feed it as you do at home, see that it has clean, fresh water at all times and that its pen is clean.
- Be sure that your coop card is properly filled out and is attached to your coop at the fair.

**Groom yourself to**

- Be neat and clean.
- Be alert and attentive. Give your attention to the judge and follow his instructions promptly.
- Move quietly and with confidence.
- Look and be pleasant.
- Be courteous to the other contestants.

**Showing your rabbit**

- Be ready when your class is called and be prompt in taking your rabbit to the judging table.
- Place your rabbit in line with the others on the table. Keep it well posed at all times.
- Pay attention to your rabbit and the judge.
- Be sure that you know the breed, age, sex and the parts of your rabbit so that you can answer the judge's questions.
- Be ready to move your rabbit as the judge may direct and to answer questions. Be prepared to show its teeth or sex to the judge if he asks you.
- Continue to show your rabbit after they have been placed and the winners announced. Be sure that you carry it properly when you take it back to its hutch.
Judging Rabbit Showmanship

Suggestions for the Rabbit Showmanship Judge

- At the beginning of the contest tell the club members what they are expected to do.
- If coops or hutches are available you may have each contestant take his rabbit out of the coop and place it on the judging table.
- Have the club members pose their rabbits for a side view, rear view, and front view, and for you to feel of the rabbit.
- Have each club member pick up and carry his rabbit.
- You may ask the club members to show you the teeth or the sex organs of their rabbit.
- You may have a young rabbit present and ask the members individually to tell you which sex it is.
- You may ask the club members questions concerning breeds of rabbits, disqualifications, names of parts of the rabbit, and desirable conformation characteristics.

SCORE CARD FOR RABBIT SHOWMANSHIP CONTESTS

- Appearance and condition of the rabbit .......... 25 points
  Cleanliness, fleshing, condition of fur, and training.

- Appearance and attitude of the club member .. 25 points
  Clean, courteous, attentive.

- Showing the rabbit .................................. 25 points
  Ability to pick up, carry, pose and handle the rabbit.

- Knowledge of rabbit .................................. 25 points
  Ability to answer questions regarding breed, parts of rabbit, general disqualifications, desirable conformation, and how to distinguish sex.

  Total points ........................................ 100
Rabbit Talk

Breed. Kind of rabbit.
Breeding. Mating a doe with a buck.
Buck. Male rabbit
Carcass. Edible part of rabbit slaughtered for market.
Conformation. Body shape or build.

![Important parts of a rabbit.]

Doe. Female rabbit.
Dry doe. Doe that is not nursing young.
Fitting for show. Preparing rabbit for show.
Gestation. Time that the doe carries her young from breeding to kindling.
Hutch. Home for a rabbit.
Inherited. To receive from parents or grandparents.
Kindling. Giving birth to young.
Litter. Brother and sister bunnies born together.
Pelt. Skin and fur of rabbit.
Pregnant. About to produce young.
Reproduce. To have young.
Suckle. To nurse.
Testicles. Male reproductive glands.
Wean. To remove doe from young.
Wry tail. Crooked tail.