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**Hare-Raisers: Kansas youth bunny up to 4-H project**

Organizers say raising rabbits is ‘year-round project’

*By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – For many, raising rabbits seems like a simple gig: Put some food out, clean the cage and enjoy the furry snuggles.

But for more than 1,000 Kansas 4-H youth who participate in the annual rabbit project, it’s a bit more involved.

“It’s a year-round project,” said Briony Smith, a 4-H Youth Development agent in Butler County. “Typically, these youth don’t sell their animals at the county fair; they are taking those animals home to use during the next year’s project.”

In fact, Smith adds, often the work multiplies – quickly. The 4-H rabbit project includes not only maintenance and care for the first rabbit, but also breeding and care for her litter.

“When the litter is weaned, youth begin to learn about breeding traits so they can select which one’s to keep for their own projects; which one’s might be better for other 4-Hers’ projects; and which one’s are best suited as pets,” Smith said.

Within 6-8 months of owning their first rabbit – that is, once the first litter arrives – youth in the project get hands-on experience in selecting animals for production, and creating their own bloodline.

“Second year 4-H members typically have their own animals to show out of their own breeding line,” Smith said.

At county and state fairs, Smith said youth don’t show their animals in a ring as is common with larger animals.

“It’s more of a conversation with a judge,” she said. “(The youth) takes the rabbit to a table then goes through an examination of the animal, much as a judge would do. They must explain the
parts of the rabbit – including the eyes, ears, nose, tails, tail and feet – and explain what they look for when they decide whether a rabbit is of high enough quality for a show."

“There is quite a bit of knowledge that is needed to be successful, as well as developing public presentation skills.”

Smith said youth from Butler, Sedgwick, Kingman and Harvey counties are currently working together in the rabbit project, meeting monthly to challenge each other on their current knowledge about rabbits.

More information on the 4-H rabbit project, or on any of nearly three dozen projects offered in Kansas, is available online. Interested person can also contact their local extension office.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas 4-H youth development, www.kansas4-h.org

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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