

Starting a 4-H Rabbit Project



What You Can Learn

A 4-H rabbit project can be a fun, engaging, rewarding experience. This project can be successful in urban or rural areas and is ideal for those with limited space. You should treat rabbit projects as you would any other animal projects you care for, providing them with proper care, dedication and essential resources to stay healthy.

Rabbits can be raised for pleasure or profit. You can have them as pets, show them or raise them for their meat, fur or fertilizer. Many 4-H members and adults enjoy showing their rabbits at fairs and rabbit shows. Raising and showing rabbits requires hard work and dedication to be successful. However, the entire process can be enjoyable with the right supplies and information.

What Will a Rabbit Project Cost?

Before you start a rabbit project, think about the costs involved. Foundation stock, housing, feed and labor can be expensive, and the costs will add up over time. Your start-up costs specifically will depend on how large and what type of project you wish to begin.

Make sure to purchase good quality, purebred stock from reliable, reputable breeders. Once you purchase the animals and they are in your care, maintain a regular, satisfactory feeding and watering regimen. Many feed brands are available, all slightly different from one another. Choose feed that works best for your particular animals.

You can raise rabbits indoors or outdoors. Modify your rabbit housing and equipment to your own situation. Make pens or hutches as comfortable as possible, and use the appropriate size for the breeds you plan on raising. The housing should supply adequate light and ventilation, provide protection from predators, and prevent drafts and direct exposure to the elements.



Information on selecting equipment, feed and foundation stock is presented in bulletins available from your county Michigan State University Extension office. Estimated start-up costs for a 4-H rabbit project are listed below.

Stock – This will vary depending on the breeder the animals come from. Some breeders may charge anywhere from \$20 to \$30, and others may charge more than \$50.

Hutches – Expect to spend \$30 to \$200 per cage. The price will depend on the size of the cages and the number

of cages per unit. It also will depend on whether you buy new or used cages, what they are made of and whether they are meant for indoor or outdoor use. Prices will vary between cage companies as well.

Equipment – You will pay from \$3 to \$10 per pen for feed and water containers, and from \$10 to \$20 per compartment for carrying cages. (This will depend on the size of your rabbits, the number of compartments in the carrying cage and the cage company.) Remember to have feed and water containers for both the pen and the carrying cages.

Feed – Rabbit pellets will cost \$.10 to \$.15 per pound. Although you can feed your rabbits other feeds, rabbit pellets are formulated to meet their nutrient requirements and are readily available. Depending on their size, each rabbit will need 1 to 4 pounds of pellets each week.

Veterinary Care – This will vary according to the number of rabbits you raise, the type of facility you have, your management techniques and the preventative health care program you use.

Labor – Only you can decide on how much your time is worth.

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Before You Commit

Before you commit yourself to a 4-H rabbit project, be sure to outline your goals, analyze and plan your project, and consider problems that might arise. Obtain a reliable contact to whom you can ask your questions throughout the process. Answering the following questions yourself may help you understand what a 4-H rabbit project involves and the level of commitment you'll need to succeed.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- ▶ Why do I want to raise rabbits?
- ▶ What breed or breeds of rabbits do I want to raise? How much will they weigh when they're full grown?
- ▶ How much money can I afford to spend to buy rabbits?
- ▶ Will I keep my rabbits in indoor or outdoor hutches?
- ▶ Do I want to buy or build my rabbit hutches? Who can help me build them?
- ▶ How much will each pen cost?
- ▶ How many pens do I need?
- ▶ Will I have time to feed, water and care for my rabbits every day?
- ▶ Will my parents let me raise rabbits? Will they help me with my 4-H project?
- ▶ Is there a market or use for my rabbits?
- ▶ What can I gain from this experience? What can I learn?
- ▶ Am I ready to entirely commit to having an animal project?
- ▶ Do I plan on breeding or expanding my herd?
- ▶ How will my set-up change as the seasons do?
- ▶ Do I understand that this is a long-term commitment?

Acknowledgments

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