

features

HANDS-ON

Show business

The 4-H road to competitive rabbit exhibiting teaches important skills

4-H is one of the longest-running positive youth development organizations on Prince Edward Island. Its family-oriented, community-based clubs provide opportunities for young Islanders to learn leadership and life skills while promoting agriculture awareness.

P.E.I. has almost 600 4-H members ages nine to 21 who belong to one of 26 clubs Island-wide.

AT A GLANCE

Where to find 4-H members showing livestock this summer:

- ◆ Prince County Exhibition, 4-H Day, July 24
- ◆ Crapaud Exhibition, 4-H Day, July 25
- ◆ Provincial Exhibition (Old Home Week), 4-H Day, Aug. 19
- ◆ Dundas Exhibition Aug. 28-30, 4-H Livestock being shown each day
- ◆ Exposition agricole et Festival de la région Evangeline, 4-H Day, Sept. 4
- ◆ 4-H Rural Youth Fair at the Dundas Exhibition Grounds, Sept. 19



BRENDA LARSEN/THE GUARDIAN

Judge Keith McAloney gives careful consideration to an Intermediate Showmanship Class of 4-H rabbits at the 2014 Crapaud Exhibition.



Robert Larsen
Animal Talk

Happy endings



ERIN MULLEN/THE GUARDIAN

Stephanie Darte gives a cuddle to Azalea. The Darte family came to the P.E.I. Humane Society during the July Red Tag Cat Sale where they met and adopted this beautiful tortoiseshell cat.



NINA LINTON/THE GUARDIAN

Thanks to many hours of handling by their 4-H Rabbit Project owners, these rabbits wait calmly on their show mats for the judge's decision.

For many 4-H members, summer marks the beginning of the exhibition circuit, one of the most rewarding times of the 4-H year.

From fall through spring, much care and energy goes into 4-H member projects, which are proudly displayed at six Island fairs and exhibitions during the summer months.

Many members participate in

projects involving livestock, and such projects help members learn about responsible care for their animals, whether for showing or as pets.

4-H members may also choose to enter their animals into competitions.

This article will focus on the competitive showing of rabbits.

See LEARNING B6

COLUMN

Learning skills in 4-H

FROM B5

4-H members taking the rabbit project must first learn how to carry and then pose their rabbit to display its various attributes.

Although this may sound simple, factors such as the rabbit's temperament and the confidence of the person showing the rabbit play a huge role in making this one of the hardest skills to learn.

Once they've mastered that skill, 4-H members then learn how to show a judge the individual parts of the rabbit including the ears, eyes, nose, and teeth, straightness of the front and hind legs, the toe nails and hocks (bottom of the rabbit's hind feet) and the tail. Club leaders encourage members to work with their animals every day so both the person and the animal are as relaxed and comfortable as possible come competition time.

It's also very important to learn about rabbit husbandry. This includes knowing the breed, colour and breed standard as well as potential illnesses and medical treatments that can affect rabbits. A member can competitively show up to four purebred rabbits and four mixed-breed rabbits in two classes - showmanship and con-

formation. Showmanship classes demonstrate a member's knowledge and ability to handle their rabbit. Conformation classes compare the exhibited rabbit to its ARBA (American Rabbit Breeders Association) breed standard.

Along with the recognition for all of the hard work that goes into showing a rabbit, winners also receive rosettes, ribbons and cash prizes. Even though not all rabbits have the requirements to be show rabbits, they still make rewarding pets for the person willing to put time and energy into caring for them properly.

Next month in Animal Talk: Standards for horse care.

Robert Larsen is a senior member of the Albany Centennial 4-H Club and has been showing rabbits competitively for the past seven years. 4-H is one of the member groups of the P.E.I. Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI), the goal of which is to improve the welfare of owned and unowned companion animals on P.E.I. Other members are the P.E.I. Humane Society, SpayAid, Cat Action Team, P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, P.E.I. Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College. See www.gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI for more information. Readers are invited to send questions to cawipei@gmail.com.