

For Immediate Release

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COMPANION ANIMALS AND YOUTH ... THE PERFECT COMBINATION

Ohio 4-H offers over 200 project areas ranging from animal sciences to woodworking and everything you can imagine in-between. A growing project area for youth, ages 8 and in third grade to 19, is in the area of companion animals where participants have a chance to learn more about their favorite household pets, according to Lucinda Miller, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development.

“Most homes in Ohio currently have some type of small animal being cared for by one or more youths,” Miller said. “Ohio 4-H offers many project books and other resources to help adults prepare to work with youth to learn more about pets, including proper care and feeding.”

There are seven small animals currently featured in the “Ohio 4-H Small Animals Resource Handbook and Project Book” produced by OSU Extension, Miller said. These animals include gerbils, hamsters, mice, rats, chinchillas, ferrets, and hedgehogs. In addition, 4-H members may enroll in one of many dog projects in which they learn about and practice dog care, showmanship, and obedience. Three different age and/or experience levels of cat projects are available to boys and girls, as well. Boys and girls can take their guinea pigs and pet rabbits by enrolling in either of those 4-H projects. New for 2007 is the Reptiles and Amphibians Idea Starter. Youth interested in taking lizards, snakes, turtles, and other such creatures, can enroll in the Reptiles and Amphibians project and create their own project plan.

The small animal educational materials are divided into age-appropriate activities and youth who take the project can complete exercises related to their specific small animal(s). Additionally, dog project area resources are divided according to an individual's skill and experience levels. Also, many local counties and clubs host dog training sessions and activities. **[information about local event or session]**

According to Miller, youth engaged in small animal projects will learn (1) specific information related to care and feeding of their pet, (2) life skills, (3) patience and understanding for small animals, (4) compassion for people and animals, (5) responsibility, (6) responsible pet ownership, (7) understanding of the companion animal industry, and (8) appreciation for the importance of companion animals and the effects they have on the lives of people.

For more information about companion animal 4-H projects, contact **[county educator's full name]** of **[county name]** County Extension at **[county phone number]**.

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