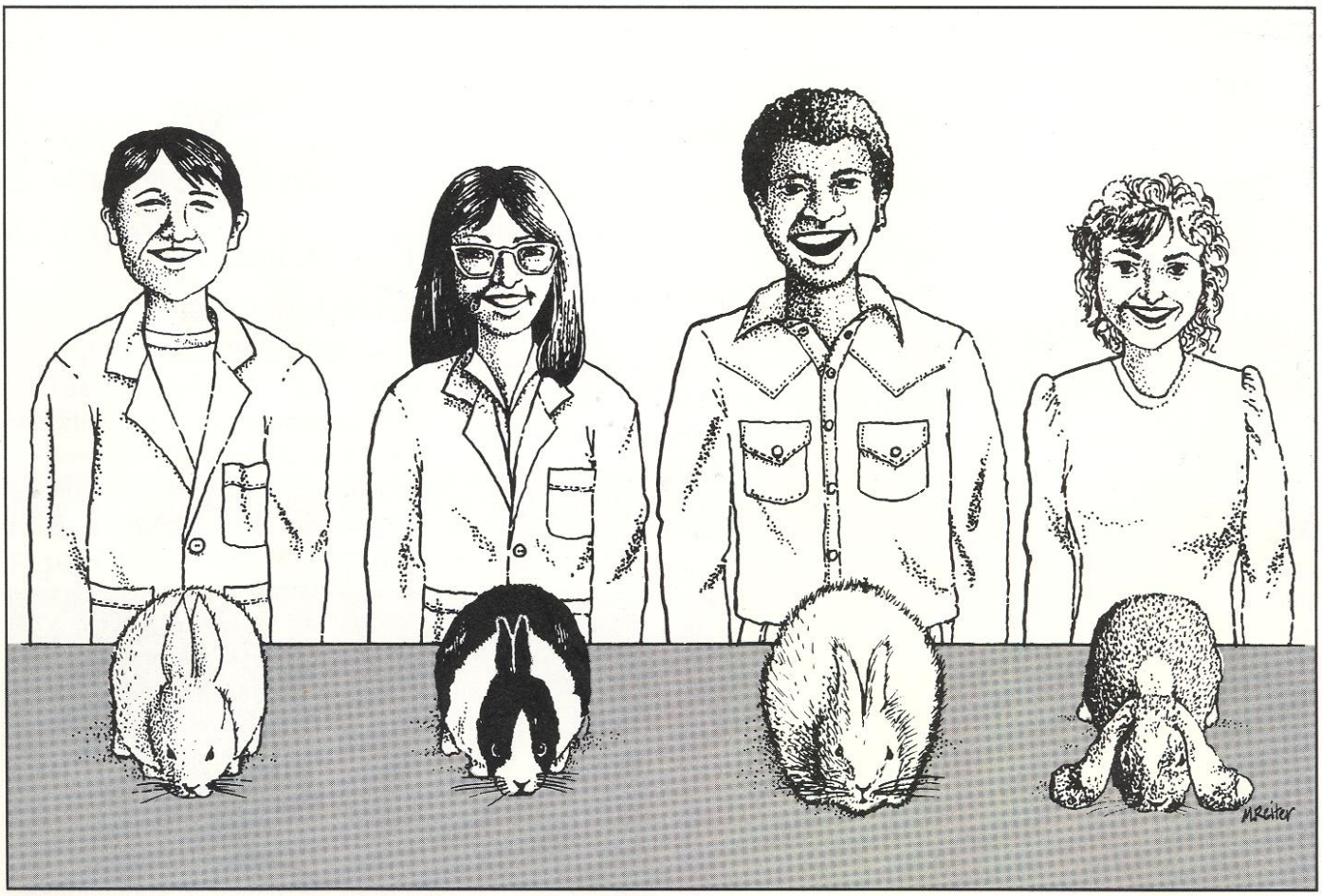
Rabbit Fitting & Showing

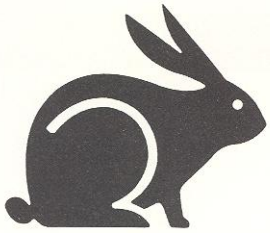


MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

MSU is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution. Michigan State University Extension educational programs and materials are available to all without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion or age.

Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Gail L. Imig, Director, MSU Extension, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. This bulletin becomes public property upon publication and may be reprinted verbatim as a separate or within another publication with credit to MSU. Reprinting cannot be used to endorse or advertise a commercial product or company. **Printed on recycled paper. 5P-2R-10M-4:95-BP-RM**



Fitting and showing rabbits gives 4-H'ers the chance to compete with other members in their county or from other parts of the state. In rabbit shows, the rabbits are judged, rather than the 4-H'ers. In a fitting and showing contest, the judge evaluates the members on the skills they demonstrate and their general knowledge of rabbits. The judge also considers each participant's preparation, attitude and behavior.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of a rabbit fitting and showing contest are to develop:

- ❑ **Practical skills.**
- ❑ **Leadership qualities.**
- ❑ **Competition and sportsmanship skills.**
- ❑ **An interest in raising rabbits.**
- ❑ **A positive image about rabbit raising.**
- ❑ **An appreciation for rabbits and knowledge of how to handle them in a humane way.**

FITTING

Fitting refers to the selection of a rabbit for show, and the care of that animal to enhance its condition and appearance. Fitting also includes any preparation of the rabbit before the contest, such as checking for ear mites, trimming the toenails, removing dead fur and cleaning the fur.

Selecting a rabbit

When you start a rabbit project, choosing a rabbit breed is a very important decision. There are many rabbit breeds to choose from. Your 4-H leader can help you decide which breed is best for you. It's a good idea for a beginning member to choose a small or medium-sized breed rather than a large breed. This is because it can be very frustrating for a beginning 4-H'er to handle a large rabbit during the examination section of the contest. The emphasis is on how well you work with the animal to demonstrate your knowledge and ability in the handling skills.

When selecting an animal, it's important to choose a rabbit older than four months. Younger rabbits tend to get excited more easily than older ones. Either sex can be used in the contest. It's important that the rabbit you choose for the contest doesn't have any eliminations or disqualifications. Choose your rabbit three to six weeks before the contest so you have time to train it to be shown.

Caring for your rabbit

Once you decide which rabbit to enter in the contest, it's important to give special attention to feeding and caring for that rabbit. You may wish to separate the rabbit from your other rabbits and house it where you can give it special attention. To prepare for showmanship contests, handle your rabbit often and expose it to other people and rabbits. Give it quality feed and fresh, clean water regularly.

If your rabbit has a minor disease problem (such as ear mites) treat it immediately so that the problem is completely gone by the time of the contest.

To remove loose fur, wet your hands, then run the palm of your hand back and forth over the rabbit from head to tail. Be sure to keep the rabbit's hutch clean, too, because hutch stain is difficult to remove.

Older rabbits may have long toenails that you'll need to clip with a heavy-duty nail clipper several weeks before the contest. Be careful not to cut too close or the nail will bleed and stain the rabbit's fur.

Participant Guidelines

A rabbit fitting and showing contest is an important event, and your appearance is a very significant part. Your clothing should be neat and clean, and should include long pants, slacks or skirt; long-sleeved shirt or blouse; and shoes (no sandals). Your hair should be neatly combed and long hair tied back. Your face and hands should be clean. Fingernails should be clean and neatly trimmed. In a county contest, the superintendent may specify a dress code. In the state contest, it's recommended that you wear a show coat. If you wear a tie, secure it. Jewelry should not be worn during showmanship competition.

SHOWMANSHIP

Showmanship is exhibiting an animal in a manner that highlights the animal and demonstrates the person's husbandry knowledge and skills. Rabbit showmanship doesn't start the week of the contest; you should practice showing techniques weeks before the show. In addition to your skill and knowledge, the judge will also be evaluating your care and training of the rabbit.

There are several methods to use when handling your rabbit. Each breed of rabbit should be handled according to the guidelines for that breed. Contact the American Rabbit Breeders Association, Inc., P.O. Box 426, Bloomington, IL 61702, for more information on breed guidelines.

Preparing for showmanship competition

At the state level, participants are silent during the showmanship part of the competition. You should speak only in response to the judge's questions.

The showmanship competition begins when the judge asks you to bring your rabbit to the table at the assigned area. Stand behind the table with your rabbit in front of you, facing the judge *(figure 1)*. When the judge instructs the participants to "handle your rabbits," perform the following steps. (These directions are for right-handed contestants. Left-handed contestants should use the opposite hand from that noted in the steps.)

Handling your rabbit

Step 1: Put your right palm on the shoulders of the rabbit, over the ears. Take a good grip on the shoulder skin. Hold the ears lightly inside your palm *(figure 2)*.

Step 2: Lift the rabbit's front legs by raising your right hand *(figure 3)*.

Step 3: Use your left hand to support the rabbit's hindquarters *(figure 4)*.

Step 4: Lift the rabbit and bring it in so its head is under your left armpit. Lower your left arm and bring that arm toward your abdomen so that the rabbit's head is hidden in your armpit and the rabbit's weight is completely resting on your left hand *(figure 5)*.

Step 5: Lower your right hand to your side *(figure 6)*.

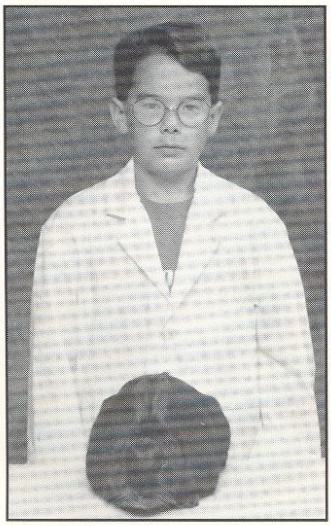
The above steps are for commercial breed rabbits. Recognized procedures for handling fancy breeds are also acceptable, such as:

◆ Lifting from the underside *(figure 7)*. This handling and carrying method is recommended for small- or medium-sized rabbit breeds. It can also be used for breeds with delicate fur, such as satin and rex. Pick up the rabbit by placing the palm of your hand under its abdomen and lifting. You shouldn't disturb the animal's color pattern, markings or fur with this method, because the rabbit is not held very firmly.

◆ Holding only one ear under grasp (as in lops) *(figure 8)*. The important thing is not how fast you pick up the rabbit, but whether the judge sees the various steps you use and how well you perform them. However, don't expect the judge to

PREPARING

Figure 1



HANDLING YOUR RABBIT

Figure 2

Figure 3

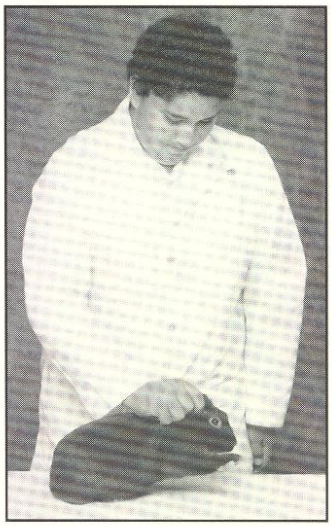


Figure 4

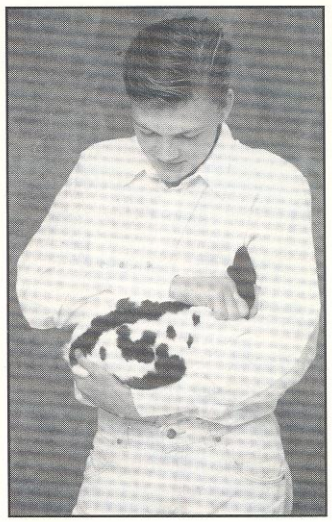


Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

HANDLING YOUR RABBIT (continued)

acknowledge each participant's individual steps.

◆ Grasping both ears between your index and third fingers and gently lifting or turning the rabbit using your other hand for support *(figure 9)*. This method should be used only for small breeds because it doesn't give medium and larger breeds enough support.

Posing your rabbit

The recommended way to pose the rabbit is facing the judge. This is because several people will be working side by side at the table, and the rabbits will be close together. If the rabbits are posed sideways (head to tail), the rabbits (especially bucks) may be distracted by the rabbits next to them. Posing straight ahead should solve this problem. Pose your rabbit at least two feet away from the rabbit on either side of it.

Posing the rabbit is done so that the animal is neither stretched out nor tucked in (depending on the breed standard). When posing your animal, try to give a good impression of the breed and of your rabbit.

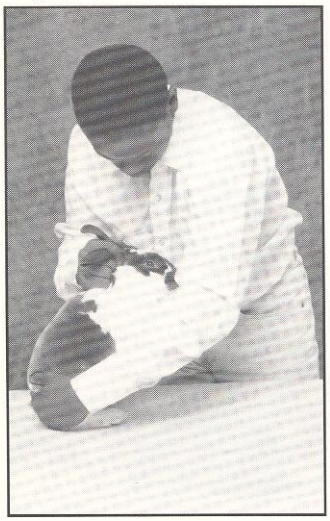
When you practice posing your rabbit, make sure you have a table and a rug or piece of carpet on which to place the animal. Don't try to pose the animal on a smooth surface since it won't have firm footing and may slip.

Before posing your rabbit, cover its eyes with the palm of your hand so that it will sit calmly rather than struggle *(figure 10)*. With your other hand, set its forelegs in alignment with the eyes *(figure 11)* and its hind legs in alignment with the hips

HANDLING YOUR RABBIT (continued)

Figure 8

Figure 9



POSING

Figure 10

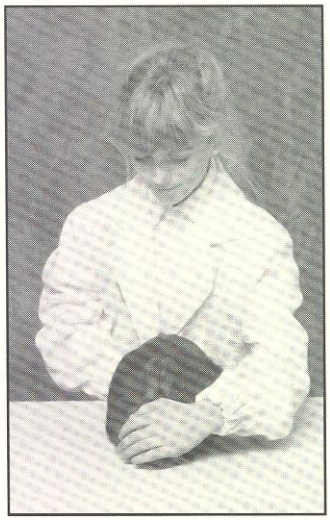


Figure 11

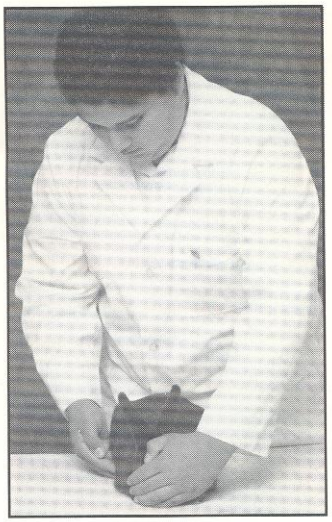


Figure 12

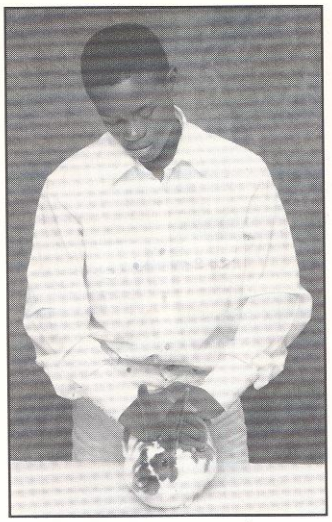


Figure 13

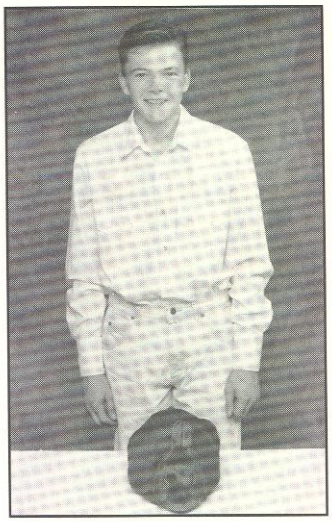


Figure 14

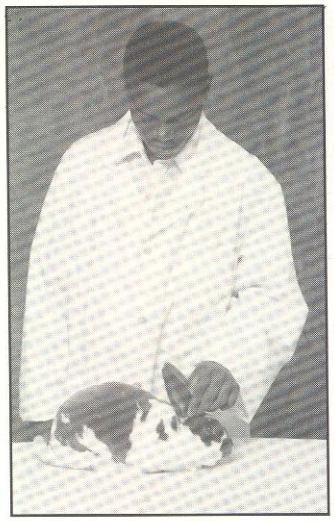


Figure 15

POSING (continued)

(figure 12). Gently stroke the rabbit on the back when you're done positioning it *(figure 13).* Keep your movements to a minimum; the less you have to do to secure the proper response from your animal, the better your performance will be judged.

After the judge gives the instruction to pose, you'll have two to three minutes to place your rabbit in the proper position. When you're done, take a step back and place your hands at your side *(figure 14).*

EXAMINING

Examining your rabbit

In the showmanship part of the rabbit contest, the judge tries to determine each participant's knowledge in checking his or her rabbit for eliminations and disqualifications. You need to demonstrate these practical skills. The judge will evaluate you on how smoothly, systematically and confidently you perform each of the examination steps.

The rabbit should be on the table, since this is a continuation of posing. However, you should turn the rabbit sideways, with its head to your left. The examination includes the following steps.

Step 1: Start with the head area. Squeeze the base of each ear and open and examine each ear to make sure that the rabbit doesn't have ear mites. Also check for any nicks in the ears and for a tattoo in the rabbit's left ear *(as shown in figure 15 and the illustration on page 6).*

EXAMINING (continued)

Figure 16

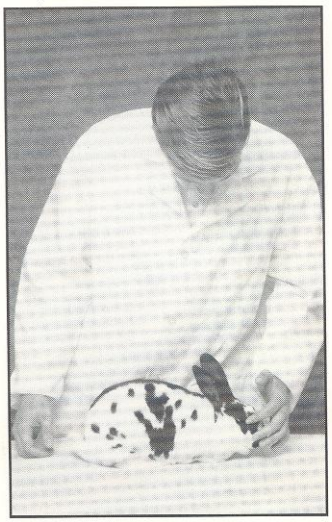


Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21

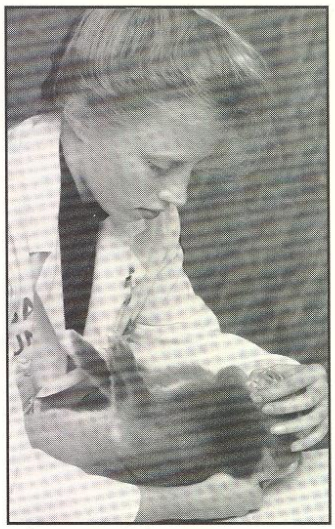


Figure 22

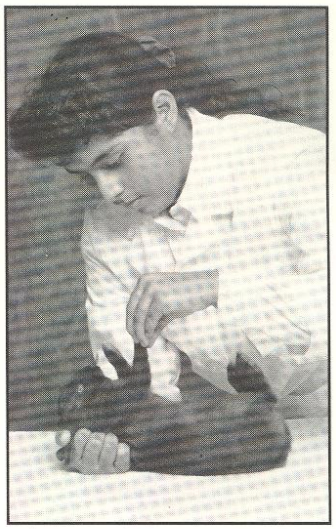
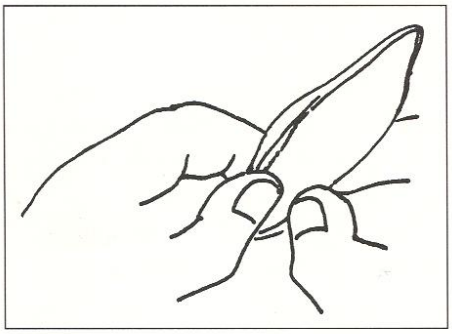


Figure 23

EXAMINING (continued)



Step 2: Check the rabbit's eyes by pointing your index finger at each eye to make sure the animal isn't blind and doesn't have weepy or cloudy eyes *(figure 16)*. Don't stick your finger in the rabbit's eyes.

Step 3: Turn your rabbit smoothly onto its back. This is a very important step, because the judge will observe whether the rabbit is under your control. Make sure you provide adequate support for the rabbit when you turn it over. Don't allow the animal to struggle or kick. Do this step in a very smooth manner. Secure a firm hold of the shoulder skin over the ears with your right hand as you do when beginning to handle your animal *(figures 17 and 18)*. Bring your left hand around the outside of the animal *(figures 19 and 20)* to support the hindquarters when turning your rabbit onto its back.

Step 4: Point your left index finger to the rabbit's nose area and look for any discharge *(figure 21)*.

Step 5: Approaching the rabbit from above, pull back its lips with your left thumb and index finger (first the upper and then the lower lip) to check the condition of the teeth *(as shown in figure 22 and the illustra-*

EXAMINING (continued)

Figure 24

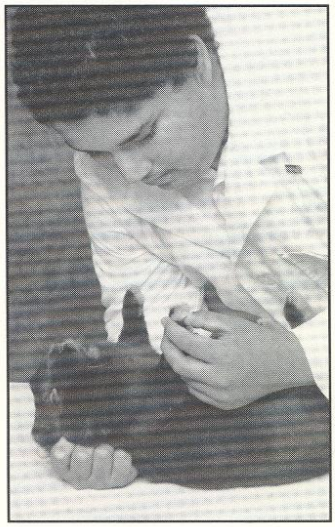


Figure 25

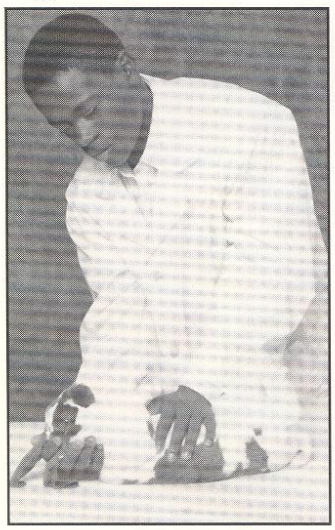


Figure 26

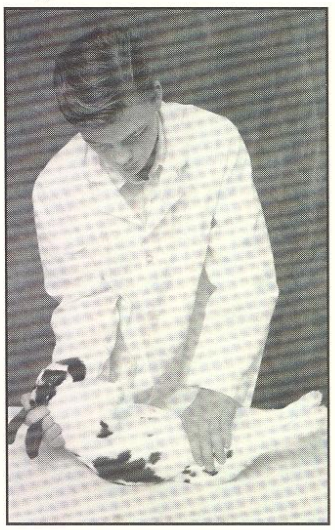


Figure 27

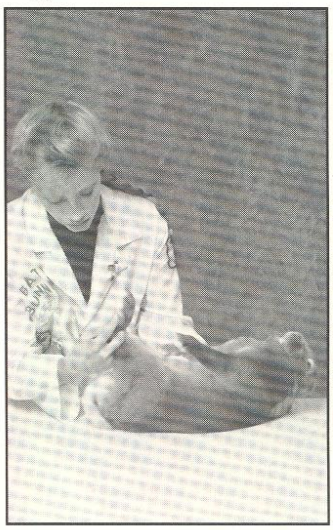


Figure 28

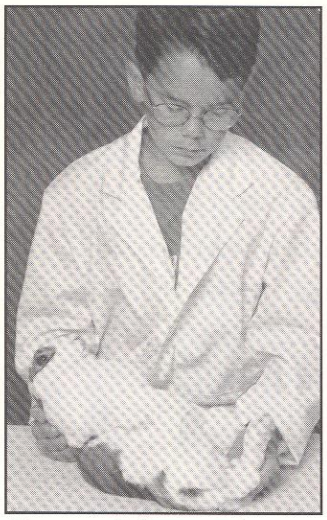


Figure 29

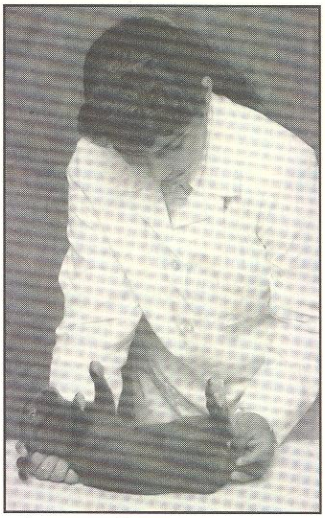


Figure 30

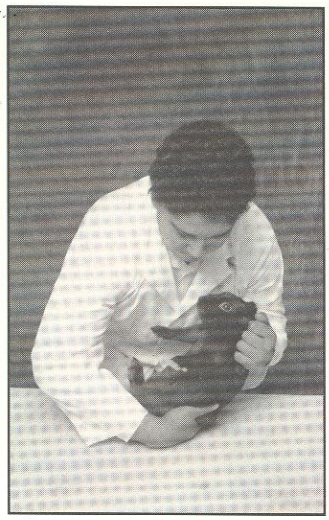
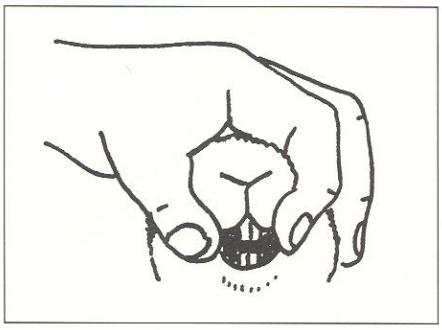


Figure 31

EXAMINING (continued)

tion below). Carefully check for cracked, chipped, broken or buck teeth. Malocclusion (buck teeth) can be hereditary and is a disqualification.



Step 6: Check the throat or dewlap area for abscesses or tumors by stroking under the chin with your finger.

Step 7: Gently pull each front leg to see if the legs are straight, crooked or bowed *(figure 23)*.

Step 8: Press the base of each forefoot to examine the color of the toenails and to look for missing or broken toenails *(figure 24)*.

Step 9: Run your left hand over the chest and abdominal areas to check for abscesses, tumors or other abnormalities *(figure 25)*.

Step 10: Push the thighs straight downward with the palm of your left hand to determine the straightness of the hind legs and to note whether they are parallel *(figure 26)*.

Step 11: Release your hand from the thigh and check each hock area for signs of sore hocks *(figure 27)*.

Step 12: Examine the color of the toenails on each hind foot and check for missing or broken toenails *(figure 28)*.

EXAMINING (continued)

Figure 32

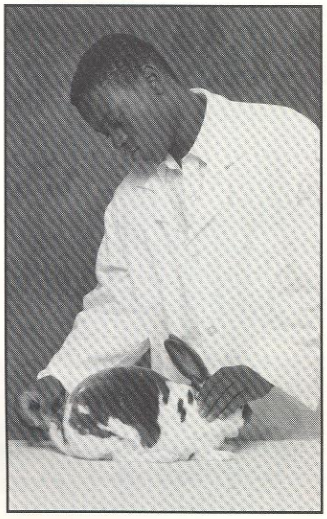


Figure 33

Figure 34

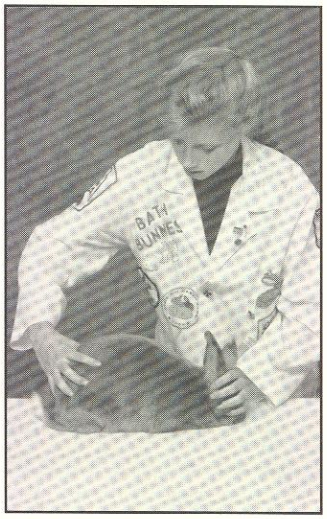
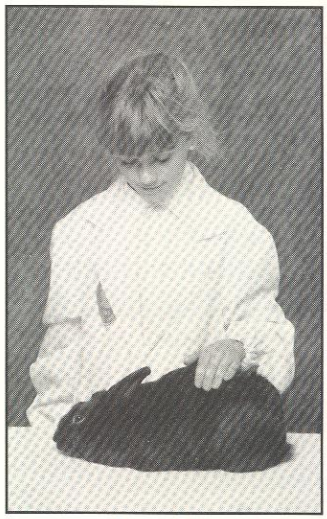


Figure 35



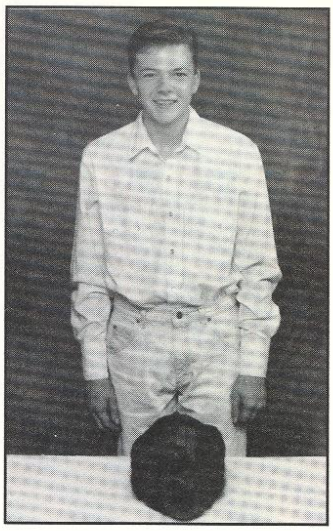


Figure 36

SCORECARD

	Points Allowed
1. Handling of rabbit (5 steps)	10
2. Posing rabbit on table	20
3. Examination of rabbit	30
4. Condition of rabbit	20
◆ fitting of rabbit	
◆ flesh condition	
◆ fur condition	
◆ general health	
5. Rabbit quiz	10
6. Appearance & attitude of participant	10
Total Points	100

EXAMINING (continued)

Step 13: Check the animal's sex by holding its tail between your left index and middle fingers and pressing down lightly in front of the sex organ with your thumb *(figure 29)*. Also examine this area for signs of any disease.

Step 14: Feel the tail to determine whether it has been broken *(figure 30)*.

Step 15: Turn the rabbit back to the original position (with its head facing your left) by supporting its hindquarters with your left hand *(figure 31)*.

Step 16: Check the tail for abnormalities *(figure 32)*. Check for proper tail carriage and to be sure the rabbit does not have a wry or screw tail.

Step 17: Place the rabbit's ears according to its breed standard, checking for proper ear carriage *(figure 33)*.

Step 18: Check the animal's meat quality by feeling its shoulders, ribs, loins and rump *(figure 34)*.

Step 19: Examine the fur quality, texture and density by running your hand from the tail to the head and back to the tail *(figure 35)*. Also blow into the fur, especially if your rabbit's breed (such as chinchillas) should have ring color. If you have an Angora rabbit, pull a few hairs from the wool and check the fur's staple and strength of the fibers.

Step 20: Position the rabbit facing the judge and stand with your hands by your sides *(figure 36)*.

At this point, the examination is complete.

Your rabbit's condition

The rabbit's condition is a sign of its health, meat and fur qualities. The breed characteristics will also be considered. The judge will examine each rabbit on the table in a general way.

Your attitude and behavior

This should be a fun time for you. You have the chance to show the audience and the judge that you're competent and proud to be a part of the contest. Be alert and smile as you complete the various steps. Look at the judge from time to time to make sure you have his or her attention. Be on your best behavior and be courteous. If the judge asks you questions, answer politely. Be a good sport, and congratulate your peers on their achievements after the contest.

The quiz

At the end of the contest, you may be quizzed to check your general rabbit knowledge and your knowledge of the breed of rabbit you are showing. The quiz may be written or oral. If it's an oral quiz, you must not discuss the questions with the other contestants.

Participants in the same division should be given the same questions. However, because contestants in the same division may be showing different rabbit breeds, this may not be possible. The number of questions the judge asks you will depend on the age division, the number of contestants and the time available.

Credits

This publication was developed by the Michigan 4-H Rabbit Programming Committee. Special thanks to Diana Langshaw and Jane Burt for reviewing this publication. Thanks also to Cotie Gillen and Bob Birchette of Kent County, Roberto and Elizabeth Montemyor and Tiffany Wooley of Ingham County, Jason Huyhn of Ionia County and Cherish Cooley of Clinton County for posing for photographs. Illustrations were provided by Sherri Callen.