

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

May 2014

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Help Support
NHAITC

Notes from New Hampshire

It seemed like "convention month" for the staff at NH Agriculture in the Classroom. Attending the Eastern Region Ag in the Classroom conference, the National Education Association - NH conference and the Granite State FFA Annual Convention has kept us quite busy! All three provided great opportunities to chat with educators to be sure we are aware of current developments in the classroom and to see how our organization could be of the best use. The Granite State Association of FFA Annual Convention was a chance to see high school agricultural education students demonstrate their knowledge and expertise. At the Eastern Region Ag in the Classroom

The World of Rabbits

Spring time brings images of daffodils, robins and bunny rabbits. The cute, furry little animals appear in pet stores and feed stores tempting parents to buy them as Easter gifts for their children. Rabbits can make great pets, but they also play an important role in agriculture in other respects. We will take this opportunity to explore their many uses.

Rabbits as Pets

Many households care for rabbits as pets. According to current data from the American Pet Products Manufacturers' Association, rabbit ownership has increased dramatically over the past decade. From 1992 to 2000, the percentage of "small animal households" owning rabbits jumped from 24 percent to 40 percent.

Some aspects of rabbits as pets are:

- cute, cuddly and entertaining
- generally accepted by other pets such as cats and dogs
- teaches older children responsibility of caring for another life
- when frightened, they will bite, scratch and run away
- rabbits may be frightened by young children carrying them around and can be severely injured if dropped
- typically housed in a cage or hutch, it is possible to litter box train them and allow them to roam free in the house or enclosure
- a busy bunny is a happy bunny, so they need access to a variety of toys, empty boxes, old towels, etc.
- rabbits do not require annual vaccinations, but they should be spayed or neutered if you aren't planning to breed them
- a rabbit's natural schedule is similar to that of a working person (active early morning and early evening)
- easily bred
- rabbits are readily available for adoption
- rabbits kept in the house have a life span of 8 to 12 years
- rabbits housed in hutches outdoors of have half the life span of indoor rabbits due to potential predators

As with any pet, careful attention must be paid to their housing, dietary and general health needs. With proper care, rabbits can be great pets and become members of the family.

conference, we spent several days immersed in meetings with other Ag in the Classroom State Coordinators. We were able to discuss ways to improve our programs, how to reach more students and generally share ideas. The Debs returned re-energized and contemplating the possibilities which we can explore in New Hampshire.

That's it for now. Enjoy the newsletter!

Calendar

Merrimack County School-To-Farm Days

May 22nd and 23rd
Carter Hill Orchard in
Concord, NH

Ag Awareness Day

Woodville Elementary
School
May 23rd

UNH School-To-Farm Days

June 3rd, 4th and 5th

Health Awareness Day

Haverhill Cooperative
School
June 10th

Ag Awareness Day

Haverhill Cooperative
School
June 11th

Lesson Links

[Angora Rabbits \(K-2\)](#)

[Rabbit Lesson Ideas \(K-2\)](#)

[4-H Rabbit Activity Page](#)

Rabbits for Fiber

When it comes to animals as a source of fiber, generally sheep come to mind first. Yet llamas, goats and rabbits cannot be overlooked. Fiber artists are attracted to the extremely soft and fine wool produced by Angora rabbits which is said to be 6 to 8 times warmer than sheep's wool. Typically, the rabbit wool is spun into yarn, but there is a market for rabbit pelts to be used in clothing and accessories such as scarves.

When considering rabbits as a source of fiber, you must first evaluate the characteristics of the different breeds of Angora rabbits (such as English, French, German, Giant and Satin). Each breed offers different wool qualities such as varying levels of softness and sheen along with a range of grooming requirements. Quantity is another factor to be considered: Giant Angoras produce 2 to 3 pounds of wool each year while a French Angora only provides just over a pound in a year. Combined with other differences between the breeds, research is definitely a good idea before adding an Angora to your rabbit hutch.

Spinners have their own preferences with respect to diet, shearing schedules and methods. Some chose to use electric clippers and others prefer scissors. Skilled spinners with calm rabbits can spin the wool directly from the rabbits. A common policy seems to be harvesting the fiber every 3 months when the wool is about 3" long. The Angora fiber may then be blended with other wool since it is an expensive product. Either way, it will produce wonderfully soft and warm products with the added the bonus of raising great companion animals.

Rabbits for Meat

There is a demand for rabbit meat in the United States. In fact, demand outweighs the commercial supply as people realize that rabbit meat is a non-greasy fine-grained white meat packed with nutritional value. With 21% protein, 10% fat and only 795 calories per pound, it has less cholesterol and more protein than chicken (20%), turkey (20%), beef (16%) or pork (13%). It also contains 33% less sodium than chicken. The USDA has declared rabbit as one of the most nutritious meats available and has developed voluntary grading standards, regulations and classes. According to rabbitbreeders.us, the USDA advocated consuming the meat at one time referring to it as "domestic venison".

More people are raising rabbits at home as a supply of meat since they produce a healthy food source in a short period of time. In one year, a single producing female can produce over 300 pounds of meat in her offspring. A cow can only give birth to one calf each year. Two female rabbits with one male can produce 40 to 50 rabbits in a year. With rabbits being so inexpensive to raise, they can be a good approach to handling

Article Resources

[Article Resources](#)
[Petfinder - Do Rabbits Make Good Pets?](#)

[At Home Pets](#)

[House Rabbit Society](#)

[Angora Rabbits for Fiber](#)

[Rabbits for Meat](#)

[USDA - Rabbits](#)

[Rabbit Agility](#)

[Rabbit manure](#)

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high food prices.

Other Uses for Rabbits

Rabbit shows have a growing following in this country. They differ from dog and horse shows in that breeders bring a group or string of bunnies for comparison to those of other breeders. Entrants must be purebred with classes being divided by breed, sex, age and color. Judges compare the rabbits to one another and to the breed standard.

Rabbit owners have borrowed another competition format from dog and horse owners - agility. Rabbits learn to run the agility course just like dogs, only the obstacles are scaled down to suit their size and weight. They too learn to negotiate the jumps, tunnels and ramps off leash while being timed. A variation on this are rabbit hoping competitions where the obstacles are all jumps with the goal being to jump far and wide. Once again, the competitor with the fastest time and the fewest errors is the winner.

Rabbits are great for even one of the most basic uses - manure. It can be a great additive to the compost pile as a fantastic source of nitrogen or you can put it directly into the garden. There is no need for it to age before use. Another application method is to make a "tea" first if you don't want the manure in direct contact with your vegetables. Either way, your plants will love it.