



Relaxing in the shade with their rabbits are Erin Algoe, 16; Sarah Zurlin, 12; Sarah Algoe, leader; and Emily Algoe, 14.

'Hare' Raising Experts Teach Rabbit Care

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MOUNT JOY (Lancaster Co.)

— Raising rabbits is serious business. At least it is for Dwight and Sarah Algoe, and daughters Emily and Erin.

Rabbit hutches in the Algoes backyard house 200 rabbits. These rabbits live with the luxury of piped in music 24 hours a day.

The music, according to Sarah, calms the rabbits and exposes them to noise so that the rabbits participating in shows are accustomed to noise and remain calm.

Each family member raises a different breed of rabbits. Dwight raises Californians, Sarah, Palominos; 14-year-old Emily, Black Tans; and 16-year-old Erin, New Zealand Whites.

To an onlooker, most of the rabbits in each breed look alike, but Erin claims that if all 70 rabbits were released, and gathered together again, she could name each one.

"Each one has its own personality and little quirks," said Erin, who spends hours tending the rabbits.

Let anyone think that rabbits are "brainless", Erin is quick to point out that rabbits have the mentality of cats and can be litter trained.

The Algoes, who live in Mount Joy, attend about 20 rabbit shows each year. But it isn't just their rabbits that they are interested in promoting but also the rabbits belonging to the 27 members of the 4-H club that they lead.

For anyone familiar to 4-H rabbit clubs, the names Dwight and Sarah Algoe are heard again and again. Their names are spoken almost reverently by 4-H members and their parents. According to members, this esteem is earned by the Algoes because their efforts go beyond the call of duty. The Algoes are dedicated to giving individual attention to each member. They pay special attention to details, and send a gift subscription

of the Rabbit Breeders Club magazine to each member. They print a monthly newsletter with news and details of upcoming shows.

Gary and Judy Zurin, whose 12-year-old daughter Sarah is in the club, said, "The Algoes are super leaders. They always contact the members individually and follow-up with visits."

The Algoes said, "Parents' participation in the club keeps kids' interest high. Some parents even become more interested than their child does in rabbit raising."

The Algoes started in the rabbit raising business about 11 years ago, when they purchased a New Zealand White for their daughter. Later, Dwight's brother, who lives in California, gave them a Californian pair. When the offspring took a champion reserve ribbon at the E-town Fair, the Algoes caught the excitement of competition. They attended the York Fair, where they met Bob Gebhart, who has showed rabbits for many years. The Algoes

purchased a trio of rabbits from Gebhart, and since then, have gradually improved their breeding and show stock.

When the Algoes first began their rabbit raising, they were not affiliated with 4-H, but someone soon suggested the couple would make good 4-H leaders for the club. The Algoes accepted the volunteer responsibility and watched as their club grew from six to 27 members within three years.

In the open show, the Algoes' rabbits sometimes compete with the rabbits of club members. This adds extra excitement for the members who count it a special accomplishment if they can win over their leaders.

One time, a club member had a rabbit with a mean temperament so the Algoes gave the member one of their rabbits. That rabbit has consistently been beating the Algoes' rabbits ever since.

Shows are becoming more competitive as more and more children raise them because they do not have the facilities to raise larger animals. Some shows have as many as 250 rabbits competing. The Rabbit Association recognizes 45 different breeds. Mt. Joy 4-H Club members raise about 12 different breeds.

During judging most breeds must sit and are judged by the rounded hump on their backs, but Tans run loose so that the markings on their body can be judged.

Rabbits are not always the docile animals they appear to be. During judging, rabbits often fight and bite.

Pedigree rabbits cost from \$25 to \$200, but the Algoes sell their rabbits for considerably less to 4-H'ers.

Rabbits across the county are suffering from a hot-weather-related illness. Veterinarians say there is no cure for snuffles caused by changes in temperatures or from exposure to other rabbits with the illness. In recent weeks, the Algoes' stock has dwindled to 70 head because hot weather places severe stress on rabbits.

"Rabbits can take cold weather much easier than hot," Sarah said. "They survived the blizzard fine in outdoor hutches, but the hot weather has taken its toll."

Bottles of frozen water are placed in the pens for the rabbits that lay next to it to cool off and the rabbits' ears are misted with a water spray. Wet cloths are also placed in the pen for rabbits to lay on.

Among the numerous rabbit hutches, the Algoes have a retirement cottage for the rabbits that become too old for show. Living in pampered style are one daughter's first Holland Lap, and the Californian pair.

Although the Algoes do butcher rabbits for eating, Sarah said that she never lets the children know the name of the rabbit that is being consumed and that she has found novel ways to serve rabbit meat in soup and casseroles in addition to grilling, frying, roasting, and cooking. Sarah said that rabbit can be

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Dwight and Sarah Algoe, 4-H leaders of the Mt. Joy Rabbit Club, tell a prospective member about the care rabbits need.

Homestead Notes