

Your First Horse Project



So, you are a horse crazy kid who heard about all the fun opportunities in 4-H and now you are interested in joining a club and getting started. Welcome! The 4-H Horse Project offers so many different experiences, you might not know where to start! That's where this packet comes in – to help you figure out some of those confusing issues and give you a better understanding of 4-H and the Horse Project in particular.

First, some background info: Maryland 4-H is an informal youth educational program of the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension. Professional leadership for 4-H is given by field faculty, Extension Educators of the University. Support for the 4-H program is given through a joint effort of county government, University of Maryland, and United States Department of Agriculture funds.

4-H is young people learning, doing, and sharing together in all kinds of projects, events, and activities, in informal situations, with the guidance of volunteer adults and teen leaders and their families. Members choose projects that fit their interests and the places where they live. Group activities such as camp, clinics, workshops, trips, fairs, and shows provide additional opportunities and learning experiences. Overall emphasis is on developing life skills such as decision making, responsibility, communicating, creative thinking, acquiring knowledge, getting along with others and understanding self.

4-H is open to youth 5-18, girls and boys, regardless of race, color, disability, age, or national origin. Regardless of the club, each 4-H group involves youth, family, and community members working and learning together.

Now for the details! You will need to **choose a club** to be involved with. Call your local County Extension Office and tell them your intentions. You will have a chance to speak to the 4-H Extension Educator who will be able to give you a list of clubs in your area and those that deal with your special interests. You can then make arrangements to talk to a club leader or visit a meeting. There are many different clubs. Some are community based and have members with many different interests. You may not deal with specific horse issues in this kind of club, but would do many different activities. There are also clubs that focus on a particular subject area – horses for example. This kind of club would primarily deal with horse topics and activities. You can join either type of club (or both!) and still carry the horse project. You may choose to visit several clubs before making your decision. Club meetings generally have a monthly business meeting portion, run by elected officers, followed by an educational topic, group activity, or presentation. When you decide on a club you will be given some paperwork to fill out and return to your leader. When you fill out your club **enrollment form**, you will need to check off the **horse project** as one that you would like to carry. Be sure to include other project

areas you are interested in too. Once you are listed as an official 4-H member, you should receive your county's **4-H newsletter**. This will keep you up to date on events and activities as well as any new guidelines for your project.

If you are lucky enough to **own your own horse**, you will need to fill out the **Horse and Pony ID card** identifying your horse or pony as your project animal for the year. Here's the tricky part – each horse can only be identified by one person, except in the case of siblings. Each person may identify more than one horse. For example: Jack and Jill may each identify Silver as their horse because they are siblings. Their friend Mary may not include Silver as her horse as well. Mary may identify Brownie and Flash as horses she will be using.

If you are **leasing your horse**, you will need to fill out a Horse and Pony ID card and the **lease agreement form** as well. The same rules apply as for owned animals. You cannot list a leased animal that someone else is using as their project animal. **All ID cards are due to the county 4-H offices by May 1st**. If you do not have a horse at all, don't worry – there are several opportunities for “**horseless**” kids to be involved with the project and some counties even have classes in their county fair horse shows just for horseless kids.

Now that you are enrolled and have your horse registered, if you have one, you will need to make sure you have a **record sheet** for your project. Records are an important part of 4-H. You learn about the responsibility and care needed as you record your activities and daily work with your project, and you also learn about the financial needs as you keep track of your expenses and income. You may choose to include your record sheet in a **record book** project. There are different formats for record books depending on your age. Your county office and leaders can help you figure out which one you need to do and how to fill it out. Ask an older or more experienced club member to help you. Record books incorporate all of your 4-H activities and are great tools to promote yourself later in life.

In addition to the record sheet, counties have other workbooks and materials available to help you with your project. The Skills for Life Series, for example, includes various activities you can do to help you learn more about horses and their care.

As mentioned earlier, there are many activities that you can participate in that do not require you to have a horse. **Horse Judging** teaches you to be the judge of conformation and performance classes and helps you learn to explain your decision. **Horse Bowl** competitions teach lots of horse information in a quiz bowl format and **Hippology** contests cover a wide range of horse knowledge as you identify all sorts of items from tack, to feeds, to anatomy. In addition, **communication contests** such as **demonstrations** and **public speaking** give you an opportunity to express yourself in front of an audience and present some of the knowledge you have gained. Most counties provide these opportunities. State contests are held in the spring and summer. Contact your 4-H office to learn when the teams meet for practice sessions or how you can get involved.

Horsemanship Standards are another way you can test your skills and horse knowledge. Check out www.4horse.umd.edu to see exactly what you will need to know and be able to do to pass the standard requirements. When you have mastered each task, you can have someone evaluate your practical knowledge and take the test for that level. Passing scores on Levels one and two and riding for level three are required for participation in the **State Fair**. Counties may have their own rules for participation in the **County Fairs and Shows** – make sure you check with your 4-H office to find out what these requirements will be so you are prepared. You should ask for a copy of the **Maryland 4-H Horse and Pony Rule Book**. This will list the rules and guidelines to follow when competing in a 4-H show in this state.

County workshops, club sponsored trips, clinics, State Jamboree, and many other opportunities exist throughout the year. You will find out a lot about county and state events through your county's 4-H newsletter. Community service work can be incorporated into horse projects very easily. Volunteering with Therapeutic riding programs, horse rescue organizations, or other service groups can often even count toward school service requirements.

As you can see, there are a lot of things you can do with the 4-H Horse Project. It all involves "Learning by Doing" and having a lot of fun! If you have more specific questions, ask your club leader or call your local Extension office and ask your 4-H Extension Educator to help you. Enjoy your 4-H experience!



JAR/2008

Maryland Cooperative Extension's programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, gender, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, marital or parental status or disability.

