

Club Spotlight

Osceola Rabbit & Cavy BA

The Osceola Rabbit & Cavy Breeders Association has a long and storied history. In 1991 the Osceola 4-H Small Animal Association shows were to promote rabbits and cavies within the local 4-H rabbit and cavy communities in West Central Michigan. Our first shows were developed within Osceola County 4-H and were held in the LeRoy Fire Department fire barn. Our first judges were John Soper, John Weltervredin, Willis Bouwkamp, and Betty Storey.

The outstanding turnouts continued the next three years and as our size grew we held the 4-H shows in the former Reed City Middle School gym. The growth of the shows gained the attention of the Marion Fair and the Marion Fair barn superintendent, Bill Corner, wanted to bring our shows to the Marion Fair during their fair week in 1993. We decided to maintain the Osceola 4-H Small Animal Association but to also develop a new association to hold the first ARBA sanctioned show. It was held on a Friday night of fair, the same night as the Modified Tractors and Desert Storm was held next door on the track. That was really interesting and I was pretty nervous about the noise over the high fence and the rabbits safety. People really enjoyed the show as they could enjoy the fair at the same time as the sanctioned show. Ed Carpenter Sr. won Best in Show with a beautiful white New Zealand in the single sanctioned show.

The next year in 1994, we held the first double ARBA sanctioned show in Michigan at the Marion Fair on the Saturday before fair. Of course, we had to double our show equipment and hired eight rabbit judges to account for possible entry. We were large enough to hold it in the large double pavilions next to the track, between it and the river. We had a great turnout for this show and it was won by a beautiful blue, Dutch doe owned by Mike Smith. The next two years went well for the Marion Fair but we were approached by the current 4-H agent in our county and he made the suggestion to bring the show back to benefit the small animals in 4-H. In 1996, the Osceola 4-H Small Animal Association held our first ARBA sanctioned show to benefit 4-H at the Osceola County Fairgrounds in Evert within our former Exhibit Building.

Over the years a new president was elected to the Small Animal Association and some new board members, who were not within the rabbit industry and not ARBA members took office. The club paid for their memberships to ARBA and MSRBA so to continue doing our sanctioned shows. After a couple of years, our core group of rabbit and cavy breeders decided

to develop a new club and still make donations by our club to support 4-H activities for rabbits and cavies within our county. This is when the Osceola Rabbit & Cavy Breeders Association fully came into being. We continue to hold our annual double shows in April of every year through the current date.

Our goals through the years has been to provide funding for our youth through educational activities. We have funded the Osceola Rabbit & Cavy Quiz Bowl Teams since 1996 through our annual shows profits. We are very blessed to have very good communities that support our shows and our area youth, insuring that these show opportunities are available for youth throughout Michigan. Our awards are always funded by local businesses and breeders from Reed City, Big Rapids, Evert, Marion, Cadillac, McBain and Falmouth. Without their support the ability to fund a scholarship, show awards, our showmanship contest held at our annual ARBA show each spring, our Quiz Bowl teams, and awards at the Osceola County Fair would not be a reality.

We have a small group of dedicated breeders, parents, and youth who work very hard to make this association successful. As part of our county requirements, for youth to participate in the small animal market classes at the Osceola County Fair they must attend three (3) educational meetings, or in our case, assist in setting up, tearing down, or working the annual ARBA sanctioned show. They are given the opportunity to learn what composes a sanctioned show, other than the common fair shows. It has afforded them to learn about breeds of rabbits and cavies, to learn how to write for judges, assisting the superintendent and the secretary side of sorting cards and filing entries for a show. Our youth participate in setting up the show boxes and learn how to fill the folders with the appropriate number of control sheets for each breed. It is an excellent educational experience that local youth may not have the opportunity to participate within.

The Osceola Rabbit & Cavy Breeders has a long and storied history throughout its developmental years. Our core group has encouraged the development of recognized breeds in rabbits and cavies in our county fairs, Evert & Marion. When one thinks back to the beginning when the fair books has Mature Buck, Mature Doe and Young Buck, Young Doe, we have come a long way to encourage the development of our youth and the area rabbit and cavy programs. We have developed within the past two years where every recognized breed, rabbit and cavy receive Best of Breed and Best Opposite Awards and every youth entering showmanship receives an award at our annual sanctioned shows. Kids deserve recognition for their hard work and efforts in their projects.

It is with the support of our communities, the breeders/exhibitors who travel to our fairgrounds to show in our beautiful show facility with a licensed kitchen, that we are still here for our youth. Our fair

board needs credit for donating our facility for our use because we support the kids. We are so fortunate that kids come first in our communities. We hope to be here for many years to come to benefit Michigan's youth.

Sherry Garrett, club secretary