

## Starting a Dog Club in Your County

A 4-H dog club is a great way to get involved with dogs, have a positive influence on children in your community and teach children (and parents) how to be responsible, active dog owners. There are currently around 20 active dog clubs in Kentucky. With 120 counties, that means there are a lot of counties where no active program exists. Kids in those counties who are interested in the dog program either have to participate as an individual or join a club in a nearby county. For some people, that may not be an option. All it takes to start a 4-H Dog Club are one or more adults willing to work with interested kids.

### Brief Overview of Kentucky Program

The Kentucky 4-H Dog program is coordinated by a State Advisory Committee and administered by an Extension Specialist at the State 4-H Office. Two main events make up the majority of the program's focus: State Dog Camp and the State Fair 4-H Dog Show. State Dog Camp is held in May of each year and it gives dog club members from around the state a chance to gather in one place for a weekend of dogs! The State Fair Dog Show is held in August of each year. There are currently the following divisions: Dog Judging, Dog Bowl, Dog Poster, and Dog Show (including drill team, costume, obedience, showmanship, agility and rally obedience). In addition we will be holding a Dog Skillathon demonstration at the 2008 dog show. There are also classes at the Dog Show for Cloverbuds (5-8 years old).

While there are no state-wide rules for running a 4-H dog club, there are rules in place for State Fair and dog camp so it important to familiarize yourself with those rules on a regular basis and communicate them to your club members.

### Starting a Club in Kentucky

If you have an interest in starting a club in your county, the first thing to do is meet with the 4-H Youth Development Agent at your local County Extension Office. They will be able to help you set up the club as a 4-H club and should be able to help with youth recruitment through existing programs. In addition, you may be able to use the Extension Office or the grounds around the office for dog club meetings.

The next step is of course recruiting members for your club. Advertising in your local paper, especially if the paper has a 4-H section, can be helpful and putting notices in the 4-H newsletter, especially if it goes to schoolchildren in your county, can also be a great recruitment tool. Working with local kennel clubs, dog trainers, kennels and other dog-related businesses is also a great way to recruit new members. Many will allow you to post flyers advertising your club and may also be willing to contribute financially to help get your club off the ground.

Once you get a group of kids, the direction the club takes is really up to the leaders, members and parents. Some clubs train specifically in obedience and the other disciplines are left to the members to learn outside of 4-H. Other clubs train in obedience, agility and showmanship, while still encouraging members to continue to expand their

training and knowledge outside of weekly or biweekly 4-H meetings. Other clubs may not hold training meetings at all if their members are not interested in showing their dogs or they do not have a dog. Rather, these clubs may focus on the non-dog events like Dog Bowl, Dog Judging and Dog Poster.

Timing of meeting again depends on the club leaders and members, but also facilities available. Some clubs meet only during the warmer months, while others are fortunate to be able to have dog meetings in an indoor facility. Another option is dog meetings during the warm months and education meetings when the weather is not fit for training outside.

#### What do 4-H dog clubs do?

4-H is informal education; therefore it is important that dog clubs do more than just train and show their dogs. While it is hard to go from agility practice to a sit down meeting to learn about dog ears, it is important that dog club members obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the dog as well as the activities that they can participate in and the equipment needed to participate. This all-inclusive knowledge will help the kids to be better dog owners.

Therefore, it is important to not only cover the basics of obedience but also health, structure, conformation, selection and equipment. The National 4-H Dog Curriculum is a great source for not only teaching kids these essential topics, but also making it fun. Competitions like dog bowl, dog poster and dog judging are also great motivators for kids to learn as much as they can.

As mentioned above, the specific disciplines taught during dog club vary, but one thing is always consistent – making the dog a better pet for their owners. This usually involves basic obedience and behavior skills which are useful both in and out of the show ring.

For more information, please feel free to contact the State Dog Committee or the Extension Specialist in charge of the dog program.