

Clover Kids Small Animal Policy

Clover Kids are encouraged to experience a wide range of activities. Learning about and enjoying small animals is one of many opportunities children can have in a Clover Kids program. 4-H Youth Development programs developed the following list of approved small animals and policies to help ensure that children and volunteers have safe and meaningful experiences with these animals.

Approved small animals are:

Amphibians – frogs, toads	Dogs	Rabbits
Birds	Fish	Rats
Cavies – guinea pigs, gerbils, hamsters	Hedgehogs	Snakes
Cats	Lizards	
Chinchillas	Mice	

Small Animal Safety Policies

- No wildlife allowed – follow Department of Conservation rules as specified in the Wildlife Code of Missouri
- All animals must be caged, leashed, and/or contained as appropriate and manageable by the child during Clover Kids meetings and events
- Parent or guardian must be present with their child(ren) when animals are involved

General Clover Kids Policies

- Clover Kids do not engage in competitive events
- Clover Kids do not enroll in individual projects
- Five-to-seven year old children are enrolled as Clover Kids and not as 4-H members

Clover Kids, Competition and Large Animals

As a state organization, the Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development is responsible for the safety of all children involved in the program. Because competition and working with project animals poses potential risk, 4-H policies must protect Clover Kids from that risk. An individual child may work safely with large animals at home and not be negatively affected by competition. But, research shows that *most* children in this age range could experience harmful consequences due to involvement with project animals and competition - even if the participation is indirect (i.e., helping a sibling or older friend in a show ring). 4-H youth development policy is determined by factors that minimize health and safety risks and maximize positive youth development. Therefore, participation in competitive events with project animals – even if it is indirect - is inappropriate for Clover Kids.

We are all concerned about the safety and positive development of children when we plan and conduct 4-H events and activities. The goal of the Clover Kids program is to promote healthy development and explore different interests.

Special consideration must be given to ensure the safety of Clover Kids. Many five to seven year-olds are not aware of realistic dangers surrounding animals and outdoor activities. Children in this age range often lack the cognitive and physical skills for controlling and understanding the strength of large animals. Also, children often do not understand adult instruction, nor the consequences associated with not following directions. Therefore, Clover Kids activities must be low risk and safe.

The emotional well being of children is important, as well. Young children have a difficult time understanding winning and losing – concepts of competition. According to research, youth are ready to be involved in competition when they:

- ❖ Know how to play fair – understand and obey the rules without too much adult supervision
- ❖ Win with humility and lose with grace
- ❖ Enjoy the skills of competition, win or lose
- ❖ Know that winning or losing is not an indicator of self-worth

These are difficult concepts to learn. Each child develops these skills at different ages and they often do not develop until youth are age 12 or older. Five to seven year olds lack emotional and cognitive maturity to participate in competitive events. In contrast, young children in non-competitive environments are more likely to develop confidence, creativity, and competence than do children in competitive situations.

The statements found in the 4-H Clover “Clover Kids shall not participate in competitive events, contests or shows” and “Clover Kids do not enroll in projects or raise project animals” are to protect children’s emotional and physical well being. Competition and working with project animals can have negative consequences for Clover Kids.

Questions and Answers

1. Why can’t Clover Kids work with large animals?
The Clover Kids program is based on youth development principles. Because we know more about the way children grow and develop we implement programs in a more safe and educational manner. We also pay more attention to risk management in a changing world where protection for youth and volunteers is critical.
2. Why is there a change in policy to include small animals?
The Clover Kids program must evolve to meet the needs of diverse audiences. Research has shown that animals have multiple benefits on children.
3. Why aren’t calves and sheep included in the small animal policy?
The approved small animals are pets, not livestock. There is a difference between the two.
4. Why can’t Clover Kids “show” in a county fair?
There are safety concerns regarding other youth and animals, particularly in a busy and unfamiliar fair environment.
5. Is the sale of an animal at a fair considered a competitive event?
Yes, because one child’s animal is compared against another. Because the current

small animal policy is reflective of small animal *pets* it is unlikely that a child would sell their animal anyway!

6. What if lack of finances prevents a Clover Kid from having a pet?
They can borrow a pet or a “share a pet” day can be incorporated in Clover Kids programming.
7. Is a Clover Kid in 4-H?
Yes, but they participate in a different way than a 4-H member. Currently, Clover Kids years do not count toward 4-H years. There was also a question about whether separating Clover Kids and 4-H is problematic.
8. Is it appropriate to have a special showing class for Clover Kids at the fair?
The word “show” should be avoided. Clover Kids can have a “show and tell” experience at the fair that would be non-competitive and similar to a judging experience. The child should receive positive feedback in a nurturing manner.
9. Why are dogs on the approved small animal list but not pygmy goats?
The current list of small animals is established for one year and will not change. Pygmy goats can be considered next year.