In the United States about three of every five homes have a family pet. If your family is contemplating pet ownership, think about these facts. Pets can be a lot of work to care for they need fed, walked, kept clean, and veterinary visits.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pet ownership can help lower blood pressure as well as cholesterol and triglyceride levels. For youth, pet ownership can provide a means of learning and fact finding. Youth will learn to make decisions, examine what is needed with pet ownership, and be responsible.

The 4-H Companion Animal project helps youth learn about their pets as well as leading the entire family through the selection of the “Best Family Pet”. The following questions will lead your family through the decision of pet ownership.

1. What could a pet add to our family?

2. What are our favorite pets?

3. Who would be willing to help care for a pet?

4. Where would be the best place to keep a pet?

5. How will be cover the costs associated with our new pet?

In most families, the benefits of pet ownership can outweigh the disadvantages. There appears to be sufficient evidence that pets can alleviate stress and improve self-esteem, and many people find their pets to be great conversation starters. The decision of pet ownership needs to be explored by the entire family.

For more information on pet ownership contact your local UN-L Extension office and for the 4-H curriculum titled, Pet Pals. UNL Extension is committed to helping Nebraskans know how—and know now.