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**CHOCOLATE RABBITS CAN SAVE THE LIVES OF REAL RABBITS,
SAYS NATIONAL RABBIT RESCUE ORGANIZATION**

March 8, 2005, RICHMOND, CA – In its annual effort to prevent the impulse purchase of live "Easter rabbits" for small children, the 10,000-member House Rabbit Society (HRS) is urging parents to consider chocolate rabbits instead.

A nonprofit organization dedicated to rescue and education, HRS blames thousands of cases of rabbit neglect, abandonment, and even death on impulse Easter purchases. The current campaign, "Make Mine Chocolate!™" (www.makeminechocolate.org) was created by the Columbus, Ohio, chapter of HRS and is aimed at changing the public's attitude toward rabbits as holiday gifts.

"Purchasing chocolate rabbits would spare the lives of the countless rabbits ordinarily bought for Easter and then relinquished to shelters, or, worse, released outdoors during summertime," says Margo DeMello, administrative director of HRS. "With proper care, companion rabbits can live 10+ years. Most children lose interest long before this, and the rabbit ends up being neglected or abandoned." DeMello says that many rabbits purchased as Easter pets will never live to see their first birthday.

"Rabbits are not 'low maintenance' pets," she says. "They require at least the same amount of work as a cat or dog, and an adult should be the primary caretaker." According to HRS, rabbits should be spayed or neutered, litterbox-trained, and exercised for several hours daily in a rabbit-proofed area. "They are incredibly social," says DeMello, "and should live indoors, as members of the family, just like dogs and cats."

"It is irresponsible for pet stores to push rabbits and other so-called 'Easter animals' during the holiday. Unless parents are willing to take full responsibility for the new animal, they should buy their children chocolate rabbits instead."

For those parents willing to make the long-term commitment, HRS suggests contacting a local animal shelter, humane society or rabbit rescue group for information about adopting a rabbit, rather than purchasing one from a pet store. A full list of HRS chapters and contacts, as well as comprehensive information on rabbit care, can be found at www.rabbit.org

House Rabbit Society (www.rabbit.org) is a volunteer-based, nonprofit organization with two primary goals: 1) to rescue abandoned rabbits and find permanent homes for them; 2) to educate the public and assist humane societies in teaching proper rabbit care.