UI Fort Hall Reservation Extension Horse Program Gets Youth Involved

The Situation
Historically, tribal members of the Fort Hall Reservation used horses for herding cattle, hunting and various tasks. Children were taught to ride horses at an early age so they could ride when needed to work cattle and perform various other duties using horses. Many of these riding skills have been lost with the advent of modern transportation and other forms of recreation. However, even today, horses are still of great importance to the reservation. Today, horses are still used for cultural practices, such as Indian Relay Racing, working cattle, hunting, rodeo and pleasure. Tribal elders and parents were concerned that youth weren’t learning some of these important horsemanship skills that are so important to their culture and that these skills an interests would lose importance. Many youth from the reservation didn’t have opportunities available to help them learn these skills and learn and participate in productive, wholesome activities. To address these concerns and needs, the Fort Hall extension program, along with a parent and grandparent advisory committee, developed and implemented a summer horse program. The horse program was tailored to teach youth about the importance of horses and to learn basic horsemanship skills as well as improve social skills and learning opportunities.

Our Response
Beginning in 2001, the University of Idaho Fort Hall Extension Indian Reservation Program (EIRP), developed and implemented the 4-H summer horse program for Reservation youth to address this important community need. The horse program is tailored to teach certain topics each meeting along with riding and training exercises. Each activity entails some reading, discussion and hands on demonstrations. The horse program is held every summer beginning in May and ends in August. Prior to the program beginning each summer, an advisory committee composed of tribal elders, parents, youth and extension personnel meet to develop goals and objectives for the current year. The committee plans special clinics and activities for the youth as well. The Tribal Business Council along with the Land Use Policy Commission granted the program permission to meet twice a week in an indoor arena owned and operated by the Tribe. Tribal elders also donate their time to teach certain topics and issues relating to horsemanship and leadership to participating youth.

Extension personnel also provide curriculum and supplies for the program every year. The Fort Hall extension educator teaches both the riding and horsemanship classes during the summer months.

The purpose of the program is to provide Tribal youth with a strong foundation in not only horsemanship and riding skills, but leadership and other life skills needed to be successful as youth and adults. Through this program, tribal youth can continue tribal traditions and develop important skills related to horses, leadership, self-esteem and responsibility. The program is also designed to get tribal youth involved in constructive and positive activities and off the streets.
The program focuses on teaching responsibility through taking care of horses, maintaining accurate records on horse health and expenses and meeting the requirement of attending a minimum of six meetings per summer. The program also focuses on development of leadership skills. Each youth has an opportunity to serve as an officer for the program to address the program’s issues each summer. Youth are also required to develop a demonstration on a specific horse topic each summer and present it to the participants, parents and grandparents. Youth involved in the program learn all aspects of working with and caring for horses, including horsemanship, horse health and nutrition and equitation.

**Program Outcomes**

In 2001, the program began with one member; 15 members are now currently involved. The program has retained over 90% of its membership and has expanded each year with the addition of new horse program participants. The program is seen as a big success on the Fort Hall Reservation, with one Tribal elder stating: “I am glad you have this program. It is getting our youth interested in horses, and it is a good program.” Another elder stated, “This program gets kids outside, working with animals and away from drugs, the streets and video games.” One parent commented that, “This program keeps my son active all summer and out of trouble.” Another grandparent commented, “Our granddaughter used to be terrified of speaking in front of people and assuming leadership roles, through the horse program, she is becoming a strong leader and can now speak in front of small audiences.” Another parent commented, “My son gets out of the house now and is ready to go to horse 4-H before I get home from work.” Over the past three years, five Tribal youth have qualified for state 4-H competitions. 2001 was the first time in 30 years that tribal youth from the Fort Hall district had competed in state competitions. This program has created a very positive and wholesome activity for Reservation youth.

Participants of the program began with a minimal knowledge base in regard to riding and horsemanship principles. Testing on a 50 point scale indicated new participants scored 15 points or less when beginning the program. The most recent test given to participants showed a mean score of 40-45 points.

**The Future:**

In the future, the UI Fort Hall Extension Horse Program will continue to grow and provide opportunities for reservation youth to gain horsemanship and life skills. Based on community comments and needs, the program will be providing more advanced horse topics and riding skills.

**Cooperators and Co-sponsors:**

Cooperators involved in the program include the University of Idaho Extension, the Extension Indian Reservation Program, Fort Hall Land Use Policy Commission and the Fort Hall Tribal Council.

**For More Information**

Danielle Gunn, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension—Fort Hall County
Pima Dr. Building #7
PO Box 306
Fort Hall, ID 83203
208-478-3777
Fax: 208-238-8018
Email: dgunn@uidaho.edu

53-05dgunn-horse.doc
8/05