

## Panhandle 4-H Ambassadors issue challenge to help communities

### The Situation

The Panhandle has struggled with significant population change and economic decline. There are staggering statistics on Idaho poverty; two in five rural Idaho families with a single mother have incomes below the poverty level. Currently, thirty-eight percent of rural Idahoans do not have sufficient income levels to meet their basic needs.

- Benewah, Boundary, and Shoshone counties have double digit unemployment rates (15.9%, 12.8%, and 11.6%) respectively.
- Food bank use in Bonner County is up 46% over 2008.
- 27,000 people in Kootenai County are serviced by the Community Action Partnership food bank.

Food bank use is not limited to just low income families. A significant number are disabled adults or senior citizens who simply are unable to earn any income for their households. Others are young adults, not yet established and unable to fully support themselves. However, the majority are families with children; some headed by single parents others by two parents. Forty percent of those served by the Community Action Partnership food bank in Kootenai County are children under the age of 18.

### Our Response

The Panhandle Ambassadors, recognizing the struggles facing families, issued a challenge to all Panhandle 4-H clubs. Each 4-H club, regardless of size, was challenged to collect non-perishable food and personal care items during April 3-9, 2009. An Ambassador is a self-motivated, enthusiastic leader who promotes 4-H utilizing skills and leadership techniques acquired through 4-H. The mission of the Idaho



**Catacootas 4-H Club** donation to the Community Action Partnership Food Bank in Bonners Ferry. Photo credit Christine Villanueva

Ambassadors is to promote 4-H to youth, parents, 4-H members, leaders and the general public through education, information, recruitment and financial support.

The Panhandle Ambassadors are composed of thirteen active members (representing three of the five northern counties). Benewah County – Jordan Lockard, Molli Darden, Diana Bailey, Hailee Mabbutt, Meghan Darden and Joe Andersen; Bonner County – Calista Gresick and Cassie Stagner; Kootenai County – Emily Aizawa, Skylar Penberthy, Braedy Thomas, John Radavich.

The Panhandle Ambassadors organized the food drive challenge in cooperation with the 4-H Program Coordinators in the Panhandle.

The challenge not only served as a community pride project for clubs, it helped promote 4-H within their local communities. Items were gathered and deliv-

ered by club to local food banks where their totals were weighed in. Special recognition was presented for total pounds donate within three club membership categories:

- Small Club (5-19 members) – Country Kids, Benewah County
- Medium Club (20-39 members) – Ramsey Raiders, Kootenai County
- Large Club (40 + members) – Northwest Rangers, Kootenai County

### **Program Outcomes**

During this inaugural effort, 32 Panhandle 4-H clubs responded to the challenge. As a result, over 4 tons of food and personal care items were donated to local food banks; providing a significant impact in help others within their respective communities. The following amounts were collected:

•Benewah County	406 lbs.
•Bonner County	607.5 lbs.
•Boundary County	1,120.2 lbs.
•Kootenai/Shoshone County	5,914.20 lbs.
•TOTAL	8,047.90 lbs.

### **The Future**

Based on the tremendously successful achievements reached within the first year, the Panhandle Ambassador Challenge will become an annual event. Not only did this program provide crucial supplies to local food banks in reaching out to others, it helped to build altruistic values among local 4-H program participants. They took meaningful steps towards becoming the caring, compassionate and civically-engaged youth and adults that 4-H programs have strived to produce for nearly 100 years.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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