



# Blackfoot youth gain life skills raising baby calves

## The Situation

Local Blackfoot businessman Neil Anderson grew up raising calves on his father's farm. He remembered the things he learned as a boy by raising calves. He wanted to start a program for the youth of Blackfoot to have the chance to raise a calf. Bingham County is considered an agriculture county by the Idaho Ag Census data. The youth that live in the City of Blackfoot don't get agricultural experiences. Many of them live in neighborhoods with limited yard space, not zoned for raising animals; some youth live in apartment buildings. The youth that Mr. Anderson was interested in targeting for the program didn't have the facilities needed to keep and raise a baby calf. Mr. Anderson came to Scott Nash, University of Idaho Extension educator in Bingham County, for help in developing a program that could benefit the youth of Blackfoot by raising baby calves.

## Our Response

Neil Anderson and Scott Nash put together a committee of community leaders to discuss the potential of starting the program in Blackfoot. Committee members included: The mayor of Blackfoot, a Bingham County commissioner, the Blackfoot newspaper publisher, the Eastern Idaho State Fair manager, a local veterinarian, a local livestock co-op owner, a retired dairy farmer and a retired businessman. The committee identified the following purposes that the program needed to accomplish:

1. To define a cattle project to help youth understand the cattle industry.
2. To teach responsibility through caring for an animal on a daily basis.

3. To teach proper management skills such as health care, nutritional needs and environmental needs of young calves.
4. To teach basic record keeping and communication skills.
5. To teach basic cattle management skills without a large financial investment.

The group decided to pilot the project this year and call it Cattle Kids. Nash recommended running the program as a 4-H project to allow the youth to participate at the county fair and drafted program guidelines based on committee recommendations. A limit of 10 youth, raising 2 calves each, in the program for the first year was established. Committee members weren't even sure anybody would be interested in participating. The local newspaper ran a story to publicize the program to the youth of Blackfoot. The day the article came out in the paper, 14 youth called to be in the program. Interest exceeded expectations, so a total of 19 youth were accepted. The youth and their parents were required to read and sign the project guidelines.

Doris Wallace, Eastern Idaho State Fair manager, donated the use of horse stalls on the fairgrounds for youth to house the calves and paid the 4-H enrollment fees for all of the youth. Dr. Dave Stanley offered his veterinary services to assist with health care. Larry Bingham, co-op owner, worked with suppliers to provide calf bottles and feed buckets for the youth to use to feed the calves.

Commissioner Carter volunteered to work with local dairymen to secure the calves for the youth. Mr. Anderson identified 14 sponsors to help with the costs of raising the calves.

## Program Outcomes

Youth and their parents participated in an educational program with Dr. Stanley to help them understand the importance of proper health care and how to recognize a sick calf. Mr. Bingham taught the participants about nutrition including what to feed and how much. Mr. Anderson discussed the importance of feeding on a regular schedule and keeping the calf stalls clean. The group worked together to establish when the twice-daily feeding times would be. Nash talked to the youth and their parents about participating in 4-H, attending the fair, keeping records and completing a record book.

Committee members were assigned to supervise feeding times to make sure the calves got fed on a regular basis. After the first week, parents took ownership in the program and began supervising the feeding schedule of the calves. Educational meetings were held every two weeks allowing participants to ask questions about discussion topics. Calves were weighed regularly to help youth recognize how much the calves were growing. Sponsor appreciation activities were held providing youth and their sponsors a chance to interact.

All of the calves were exhibited at the fair and sold to the buyer. This is a significant outcome considering none of the youth had any experience raising a calf, and the death rate on this type of calf is 8 percent. The youth completed a record book and exhibited at the fair allowing them to receive ribbons and premiums for project completion.

Each of the parents wrote a paragraph to Mr. Anderson sharing their thoughts on the program. One father wrote: "This inspired program has given my son the opportunity to care for two calves. It taught him responsibility because the calves required feeding twice a day. This has been such a good experience for my son that instead of selling the calves like the rest of the kids, he arranged to take them to his uncle's pasture. He may never make a dime on the project because the cost of winter feed may exceed the price he receives when he sells the calves next fall, but the work experience is worth it." A mother shared, "Our calves got really sick one time and my son had to explain their symptoms and actions to the vet. The vet then explained to us what he was going to do to help the calves and what we could do to help. This instance taught my child communication skills that he will use for the rest of his life." And finally this mother wrote: "I have truly enjoyed this experience with Cattle Kids. We had good times and hard times. But I believe my children gained life experiences they will use: hard work, rewards, budgeting, working as a team, how to love and be responsible for a living, breathing animal."

Youth were surveyed and asked: what did participating in Cattle Kids teach you about yourself? One said, "I can be dependable, reliable and responsible." Another said, "I can take charge and do the work that's not done." A third one shared, "Not everything comes easy and that hard work is worth it."

- 100% of the youth learned how much to feed their calves each day
- 85% learned how to determine if their calves was sick
- 69% learned the importance of daily care
- 54% learned how much work is involved in raising a calf

## Future Plans

The Cattle Kids Committee met to wrap up the program for 2009. The program positives and recommended changes were discussed. More sponsors will need to be identified to offer the program to more youth in 2010.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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