



University of Idaho  
Extension

Lemhi County, 208.756.2815 ext 283  
Fax: 208.756.6915  
200 Fulton Suite 202, Salmon, ID 83467

## Newest event at Lemhi County 4-H horse shows – written test on horse science

### The Situation

4-H horse leaders and members are passionate about the program and the project. Success is most often measured by the number and types of ribbons received at the 4-H horse shows. Judges at the shows have minutes to observe a youth as they participate in the various classes. Things can happen in those minutes regardless of how much work has been done prior to the show. When a youth doesn't receive the ribbon they think they should because of what happened in the show ring, they may become discouraged. Sometimes a youth can pin-point what happened and why and sometimes they can't. Although 4-H leaders and parents explain to them that it is one person's opinion for those few minutes on that day that is little solace to a child who thinks ribbons measure success at 4-H horse shows.

Leaders recognize that horse husbandry is and should be part of their program but because success is most often measured by what happens in the show ring, 4-H leaders focus on the skills necessary to be successful in the show ring and do not spend a great deal of time on the horse science aspects of the project. Various solutions to this problem that were discussed in Lemhi County including having leaders sign off on a skills checklist, workshops at horse camp and a written test at the shows.

Leaders started using the skills checklist, but it was only designed only to assess progress for the first three years a youth participated. There have been many workshops offered on the various husbandry topics at the Lemhi County 4-H Horse Camp, but those workshops reach a relatively small number of youth.

### Our Response

The written test was an idea that Shannon had used successfully in Utah that Lemhi County leaders decided to adopt.

As the Lemhi County 4-H horse leaders discussed the idea of offering a horse science test as an event at the Lemhi County fair they outlined several benefits to doing so.

- All youth would have the opportunity to participate and succeed. It was completely under their control of much they studied and prepared for the test.
- It would give leaders some focus areas to cover at their "inside" meetings.

The leaders chose the *Pacific Northwest 4-H Horse Manual* as the study guide for the test. They decided to focus on colors and markings; parts of the horse; normal horse; first aid; normal horse; diseases; basic handling and safety and general tack. Each year additional areas would be added so that the test covers more areas of husbandry.

Each leader was asked to read through the sections and develop questions. Questions could be true and false, multiple choice, fill in the blank or matching. A separate test was developed for each age division. The test would be worth 25 to 30 points and would take the youth approximately twenty minutes to complete. The youth would take the test as they checked in for the show and it would not be a required event. Because leaders were involved in the process they were more likely to encourage the youth in their clubs to take part in this new event. One leader quizzed the kids at her club meetings and threw them mardi gras beads to them if they got the answer correct.

The first test was offered at the county fair horse show in 2007. To encourage youth to participate, sponsors were found so that nice prizes could be awarded. In 2008, the test was offered at both the "Hairy Horse" show and the county fair show. Participation increased as youth were just handed a test when they received their numbers for the show.

### **Program Outcomes**

Lemhi County 4-H Horse program has just completed its third year of the test. Youth recognize the test as one of the events at the horse show and have stopped asking if it is required. The leaders are happy with the test. They feel the tests have given youth an opportunity to succeed in the horse program that is not related to how they do in the show ring. Since 2008, test scores have improved an average of 8.26%. We now have 100% of the youth entered in the shows taking the test.

Plans for the future include developing more tests questions, adding more areas of focus and including questions about horse show rules. It has also been requested by parents and leaders to develop a test for those competing in the working ranch horse program.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**Shannon Williams**, Extension Educator  
University of Idaho Extension, Lemhi County  
200 Fulton Suite 202  
Salmon, ID 83467  
Phone: 208.756.2815 ext 283  
Fax: 208.756.6915  
E-mail: shannonw@uidaho.edu

**Charli Williams**, Volunteer 4-H Horse Leader  
University of Idaho Extension, Lemhi County  
PO Box 12  
Tendoy, ID 83468  
Phone: 208.303.0983  
E-mail: will8152@vandals.uidaho.edu

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