Fourteen years of 4-H Shooting Sports education in Idaho

The Situation
Idaho has a rich heritage of outdoor recreation. Thousands of families participate in camping, fishing, hiking, shooting, and hunting activities. The shooting sports disciplines can involve each member of the family. The 4-H program also has a rich heritage throughout Idaho. The 4-H Shooting Sports program has been around for 30+ years but participation declined over the years. In the mid 1990’s the National 4-H Shooting Sports Development committee was formed in response to several situations nationally:

- The shooting and hunter education organizations were interested in recruitment of new shooters.
- Hunter educators were interested in teaching new hunters how to hunt and shoot safely.
- The shooting industry had a financial interest in cultivating the next generation of recreational shooters.
- The 4-H program was faced with declining male participation, especially in youth over age thirteen.

The National 4-H Shooting Sports Development committee brought all of these groups together to rewrite the 4-H Shooting Sports training curriculum and develop a train-the-trainer program. Participants in a national training were certified to teach adults at the state level who would then lead 4-H projects at the county level.

Our Response
University of Idaho State 4-H program hosted a national 4-H Shooting Sports training. Several participants from Idaho successfully certified in the disciplines of archery, rifle, shotgun, pistol, muzzleloading, and hunting. An Idaho state 4-H Shooting Sports training team was organized and trainings using the new 4-H Shooting Sports curriculum were held for 4-H leaders. To lead a 4-H Shooting Sports project, an adult is required to be properly trained and certified. There have been over 30 trainings (average 2-3 per year) provided across the state, and the need is great enough that it is difficult to meet demand.

Program Outcomes
The shooting sports are one of the fastest growing project areas in the 4-H program, both nationally and in Idaho. Recent events such as televised coverage of the 2012 summer Olympic archery games and the movie *The Hunger Games* have caught the attention of youth and sparked their curiosity in the shooting sports. Certainly the training of 4-H leaders across the state have led to more adults promoting the shooting sports projects.

Over a 14 year period the number of individual shooting sports projects has grown significantly.
There were 426 shooting sports projects reported in 2000 (approximately 10% of the Environmental Education projects) and 1,447 reported in 2013 (approximately 29% of the Environmental Education projects). The change in enrollments shows a 71% increase in the number of 4-H Shooting Sports projects. It is important to note that one individual 4-H member may have more than one shooting project. Many of the projects have been completed by new participants in the 4-H program.

The shooting sports projects help attract non-traditional audiences into the 4-H program. Youth with no interest in livestock or other “traditional” 4-H programs are participating in the shooting sports projects. Research indicates that youth who participate in 4-H are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and are more likely to do well in school and pursue careers in science and engineering. The 4-H program promotes positive and healthy life styles and the development of positive life skills.

The Future

The demand for training opportunities continue to increase not only in Idaho but nationally. The University of Idaho State 4-H program continues to encourage adults to attend national trainings so the Idaho training team can meet the needs of adults wanting to become 4-H shooting sports leaders. Currently Idaho shares trainers with Washington, Oregon, and Montana to meet the need. The 4-H shooting sports program has grown to offer district and state competitions in archery. Idaho’s first archery team competed in the 2013 National 4-H archery competition. Teams in other disciplines may participate in the national competition but more trained leaders are needed. By providing opportunities such as the 4-H Shooting Sports projects for Idaho’s youth, the Idaho 4-H youth development program will continue to grow and provide the opportunity for positive influence for Idaho’s youth.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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