Jerome County 4-H Crops Education Program

The Situation
Jerome County has a well organized and established 4-H Livestock Program. This program educates youth about animal production (beef, dairy, horse, sheep and swine), the responsibility associated with raising animals and how to publicly demonstrate their showmanship. In addition to livestock projects many youth have shown interest in crop production projects. Previous to 1993, youth with crops projects had little exposure to formal education in crop production. Also, these youth had little opportunity to display their personal talents and presentation skills other than exhibiting beets at the Jerome County Fair.

Our Response
We have established the Jerome County 4-H Crops Education Program to formally educate youth about basic crop physiology and production. Through a series of educational and experiential seminars and workshops we were able to develop a better understanding and appreciation for crop production in 4-H youth, their parents and their club leaders. This program included the following sessions:
- Sugar beets, potatoes and wheat: Budgeting, soil testing, seed quality and planting
- Soils, soil types and their characteristics

In July, the youth have an opportunity to publicly present their project during the Jerome County 4-H Crops Projects Tour. These presentations are evaluated and awards are given for the top three project presentations. These presentations provide the youth with invaluable public speaking experience in a comfortable peer setting.

Achievements
The number of youth in 4-H crops projects increased about 10% since 1993. Youth, parents and leaders involved in the crops projects were educated on a wide range of topics that were timely and well received. Youth were able to interact with University of Idaho and ag. industry representatives. All youth and adults involved had positive comments on the educational and public speaking opportunities provided through this program.
Cooperators and Co-sponsors
Although most of the educational sessions are taught by the Jerome County Extension Educator, some sessions are taught by invited experts. Amalgamated Sugar Company fieldmen usually teach petiole sampling and demonstrate how to prepare beets for exhibition at the fair. The U of I Extension Entomologist has taught the session on insect identification and management. And the NRCS District Conservationist has explained the importance of understanding their soil and stopping soil erosion. The Amalgamated Sugar Company generously sponsors a picnic lunch for the presenters and their parents, they provide awards and three fieldmen serving Jerome County growers act as judges.

The Future
Next year’s format will be similar with the inclusion of one or two field trips to major commodity receiving, grading and/or processing facilities in the Magic Valley. The Amalgamated Sugar Company has become supportive of the Jerome County 4-H Crops Education Program and wants to be actively involved in recruiting additional youth to participate 4-H Crops Projects.

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