

Ranchers Feeding Kids: A Multi-Partner Approach to Programming

Abstract

School districts face challenges to balance budgets and provide healthy meals. Oregon State University Extension agents joined with community partners to form Ranchers Feeding Kids (RFK). The program started with ranchers donating cattle that were harvested and processed for local schools' lunch programs. An educational event taught youth about livestock production, its importance to the local economy, and beef's health benefits. In 4 years, the program has grown to include 32 schools in 13 different school districts, providing over 5,500 students with meals. Forty donated cattle, with a value of over \$40,000, have provided 30,000 pounds of beef to schools.

Barbara Brody
Assistant Professor
Oregon State
University
College of Public
Health and Human
Sciences
Ontario, Oregon
Barbara.Brody@oregonstate.edu

Scott Jensen
Associate Professor
and Extension
Educator
University of Idaho
Marsing, Idaho
scottj@uidaho.edu

Robin Galloway
Associate Professor
Oregon State
University
College of Public
Health and Human
Sciences
Albany, Oregon
robin.galloway@oregonstate.edu

Shanna Hamilton
Assistant Professor
and Extension
Educator
University of Idaho
Council, Idaho
shannas@uidaho.edu

Anna-Marie Chamberlain
Assistant Professor
and Extension Agent
Oregon State
University
Ontario, Oregon
anna-marie.chamberlain@oregonstate.edu

Introduction

School districts around the nation face multiple challenges to balance budgets while abiding by state and federal laws to provide safe and healthy meals for students. Forty-eight states faced large budget shortfalls for their 2009-11 budgets (Gregoire, 2010). In 2010, Malheur County ranked as having the lowest per capita income of all Oregon counties and being #1 for poverty (U.S. Census, 2010). Additionally, the Oregon Beef Council reports, "With less than two percent of the nation's population directly involved in production agriculture, it is important to educate your students about where their food comes from, so they understand the important role of beef and the beef industry in

their lives" (Oregon Beef Council, 2012).

To address these issues, Oregon State University (OSU) Extension agents teamed up with the Malheur County Cattleman's Association. Together, they invited community partners and formed an advisory committee to establish goals and objectives and to design and implement a program to focus on the identified issues. This new program was dubbed "Ranchers Feeding Kids."

Ranchers Feeding Kids

Many cattle producers strongly support a healthy diet for growing children that includes whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and lean meats such as beef. Ranchers Feeding Kids (RFK) started with a drive to recruit area ranchers to donate cattle for use in the local schools' lunch programs. The program also taught youth about livestock production, its importance to the local economy, and the health benefits of beef.

To kick off the program, Oregon State University (OSU) Extension and program partners conducted a community-wide educational event for students, parents, and community members. Educational sessions included such topics as the importance of ranching to the state, food safety, animal feed identification, meat quality, animal feedstuffs, and creating healthy meals.

The program started in 2009 in one school district. By 2013 the program has been incorporated into 13 school districts in Oregon and Idaho, serving over 5,500 students. Fifty-three cattle have been processed for the schools' lunch programs, providing 30,000 pounds of beef.

Table 1 summarizes the steps taken to implement the Ranchers Feeding Kids program.

Table 1.
Steps Taken to Set Up and Carry Out Ranchers Feeding Kids Program

Task	Action	Outcome
Create an advisory board and volunteers to assist with planning, developing and conducting the project	Identify potential advisory board members	Set up a diverse advisory board consisting of at least 7 members
Set program objectives and outcomes	Meet with board to refine objectives and outcomes	Objectives and outcomes will guide the project and evaluation
Promote project and secure partners	Contact local ranchers and key partners to secure donations of beef and processing fees	Donated beef will be processed and provided to schools. Project will be promoted in schools, local media and

		recognition events
Meet with school foods and nutrition department	Insure all requirements for using local beef are reviewed and followed	Safe, locally grown product provided to schools
Design and plan educational component of program	<i>Contact school principals, teachers Extension colleagues and community partners Identify lessons and curricula to use Design evaluation instrument(s)</i>	Youth will engage in activities to increase their knowledge of the benefits of beef Positive marketing message about beef and the industry will be conveyed
Identify approved processing plant for processing of product	Contact local processing plants	Create a schedule for sending cattle for harvest

Program Partners

Broadening the base of partners opens up a wealth of resources that directly benefit Extension's programmatic efforts (Guion, 1998). Selecting partners who didn't necessarily think alike added to the overall design and accomplishments of the program. Partners involved in the program have included: University of Idaho, Southwest Regional Food Bank, Malheur County Cattlemen's Association, Weiser River Cattle Association, AmeriCorps Vista Volunteers, Valley/Adams County Farm Bureau, Washington County Farm Bureau, and various school districts in southeast Oregon and western Idaho.

Impacts Achieved

Since its inception in 2009, the RFK/RFY program has grown and now includes 32 schools in 13 different school districts and nearly 5,500 students that benefit from the beef meals. To date, the program has received 40 head of donated cattle, 36 of which have been harvested and processed for the schools. The remaining four were sold to pay animal processing expenses early in the program. Nearly 30,000 pounds of beef have been provided to school districts in Oregon and Idaho. The live value of all donated animals exceeds \$40,000. The success of the Oregon program inspired a similar effort in Idaho—Ranchers Feeding Youth (RFY), which has reached over 1,270 youth. The program has 61 partners in Oregon and 28 in Idaho.

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the ranchers' value of the donated beef to the school districts receiving beef for the school lunch program.

Table 2.

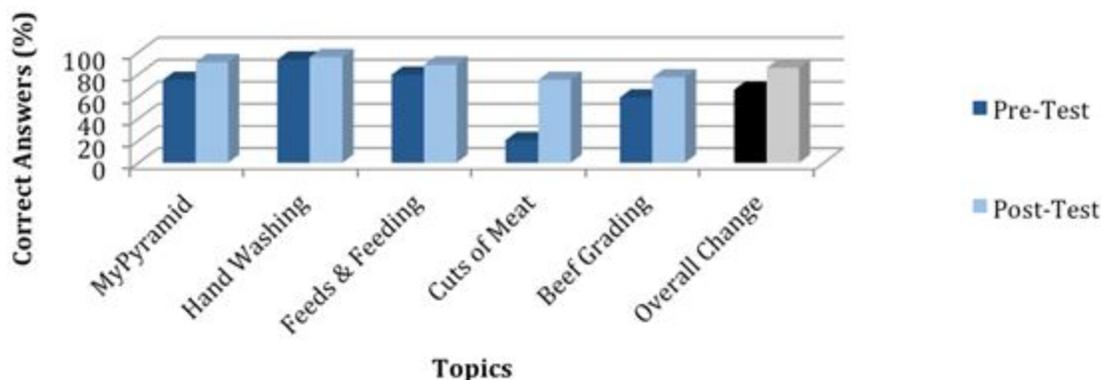
Ranchers Value of Donated Beef

School District	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total Contributed
Adrian, OR		\$1425	\$2090		\$700	\$4,215.00
Annex, OR				\$900	\$700	\$1,600.00
Harper, OR		\$310	\$1650	\$700	\$660	\$3,320.00
Jordan Valley, OR	\$1200	\$2700	\$3225	\$1440	\$1250	\$9,615.00
Nyssa, OR		\$1400	\$2925	\$2100	\$700	\$7,125.00
Ontario, OR		\$600	\$3295		\$1890	\$5,785.00
Vale, OR		\$310	\$4804	\$900	\$1400	\$7,414.00
Cascade, ID				\$430		\$430.00
Council, ID			\$410			\$410.00
Cambridge, ID			\$390			\$390.00
McCall, ID				\$645		\$645.00
Midvale, ID			\$320			\$320.00
Weiser, ID			\$430			\$430.00
Total						\$41,699.00

Pre- and post-tests were used to measure participants' knowledge change as a result of the educational events. The data that was collected in 2009 and 2011 showed an increase in knowledge regarding beef and beef production topics among participants each year. Figure 3 shows the change of knowledge.

Table 3.
Percent Change in Knowledge

Percent Change in Knowledge of Topics Presented at RFK



Implications for Extension

A recent *Journal of Extension* article (Braverman, Franz, & Rennekamp, 2012) stated that the trend toward cross-program collaborations will most likely continue, and perhaps accelerate, as the science supporting social program intervention advances. These collaborations will include more partnerships with non-academic researchers, as well as community groups. Internally, OSU Extension staff from Livestock, 4-H Youth Development and Family & Community Health played integral roles in the success of the program by providing expertise in their specialty.

The objectives of the program were to provide donated beef to local school districts and to teach youth about local beef production and the nutritional aspects of beef in the diet. Extension agents partnering with cattlemen and other community partners not only provided beef for local school lunches, but also provided an educational component for the youth. The approach used within the project for Extension to collaborate with multiple partners, across program areas and disciplines, resulted in a more diverse approach to programming that had a broad range of perspectives to design, develop, and deliver effective programs. As a result of involving multiple partners the program is sustainable long-term. The original program was duplicated in Idaho and has been duplicated in three other Oregon counties.

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