

impact

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Dairy replacement heifer program gives youth real life dairy industry experience

AT A GLANCE

The Treasure Valley Dairy Replacement Heifer Program (TVDRHP) increases youths' knowledge and interest in Idaho's dairy industry, as well as teach lifelong skills.

The Situation

The dairy industry is currently the largest agricultural sector in Idaho. The dairy industry employs more than 30,000 jobs and ranks third in the nation for milk production behind California and Wisconsin.

Youth involved in 4-H and FFA dairy projects are the future of the livestock industry. Providing hands-on experience and educational opportunities has been shown to increase youth interest in the hopes that they return to the industry as long-term employees.

Our Response

The Treasure Valley Dairy Replacement Heifer Program (TVDRHP) formed in 1992 with the purpose of increasing the knowledge and interest in the dairy industry. Over 360 youth have been involved in the program since its inception. The program is run by volunteer committee members who plan and facilitate multiple educational events throughout the year. The committee members have been extremely successful at growing and maintaining positive relationships with many of our local dairies in the Treasure Valley. These relationships are important as the program relies heavily on heifers being donated by these same dairies. Youth participants go through an application process



Committee member Susi Larrocea-Phillips helps participants by teaching dairy heifer showmanship skills.

and are expected to raise their dairy project for approximately 16 months. The number of heifers donated depends on the total number of applicants accepted each year. At the completion of the project participants will show and sell their animals at the Western Idaho Fair located in Boise. The multiple educational opportunities are as follows:

- Selection day is the first event all participants will be part of and typically occurs in April. Heifers are collected from local dairy farmers and delivered to the selection area. Three heifers are randomly selected and placed in a pen; the youth participants are then randomly drawn to select their heifer. At selection day the participants are taught about halter breaking and basic dairy cattle nutrition.

- In May, the committee puts on a showmanship clinic. Participants learn tips on hoof trimming and how to properly prepare their animal for show. They are also taught tips on how to show dairy heifers at the fair.
- In June, youth are required to participate and show their heifer at the Meridian Dairy Days. Since 1949 Meridian has been home to a weeklong celebration of the Dairy industry. Here youth are taught about writing thank you notes and recruiting buyers for the August fair.
- In August, participants in their second year will show and sell their animal. Showing their animal teaches youth lifelong skills of communication and self-confidence.
- In November, the committee holds the final education opportunity of the year, a reproduction day workshop. Participants can bring their heifer projects to a local heifer raising facility to be weighed, vaccinated, and bred. Participants get firsthand experience with weighing their animal and administering vaccines. Students are given the opportunity to choose what bull they would like their heifer bred to. At the conclusion of the workshop heifers are left at the breeding facility until successfully determined pregnant.

Program Outcomes

During the period of ownership participants will have the opportunity to develop skills in finance, budgeting, record keeping, animal nutrition, reproduction, animal selection and showmanship.

In 2024 youth were asked to complete a full program evaluation. Questions included basic demographic information and learning objectives, based on a scale of one to four, with one being no increase and four being increased greatly, from each educational opportunity provided.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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A summary of the results is as follows:

- Participant age range: 8 to 17.
- 58% participant response rate (11/19 returned).
- Average number of years in the program: two years.
- 60% of participants said they would return to the program in the future.
- 100% of participants said they are “somewhat” interested in joining the dairy industry after participating in the Treasure Valley Dairy Replacement Heifer Program.

On average across all educational opportunities, participants reported an increase in knowledge at an average value of 3.38 with three being “Increased Moderately” and four being “Increased Greatly.”

The Future

“Without the dairy replacement heifer program, Dairy Days would no longer exist. It is an extremely important program not only for the kids but for the public. It brings the dairy industry up close and personal, and not everyone gets that opportunity anymore,” says Hans Bruijn, president of the Idaho Dairy Board. The Treasure Valley Dairy Replacement Heifer Program committee plans on continuing this program for a very long time. The lessons taught to the participants are real-time life skills that can be used in any career they may choose. When asked where they see the future of the program going, Susi Larrocea-Phillips, longtime committee member had this to say, “Even if the kids are in the project for only one year you can see how much they love their animals, the transformation and growth from start to finishing is amazing and extremely rewarding. This program creates agriculture advocates which is extremely important in today’s world.”