Enhancing the Knowledge of Youth Horse Owners

The Need: The American Horse Council reports the number of horses in North Carolina at 257,000 animals with 70,000 owners, providing an annual economic impact to our state of more than $1.1 billion. Continued horse industry growth and development depends heavily on the interest of new horse owners, which in turn relies on youth development.

Serving the Need: North Carolina Cooperative Extension Horse Husbandry provides introductory horse ownership and care information through newsletters and the Regional Equine Information Network System (REINS), an adult volunteer program. Extension Horse Husbandry’s highly diversified 4-H youth horse program, strongly supported by the horse industry, trains horse- and non-horse-owning youth in basic horse science and horsemanship. More than 1,100 volunteer leaders, under 4-H agents’ guidance in 92 participating counties, instruct 4-H’ers. Volunteers also participate on seven regional and one state 4-H Horse Advisory Board.

4-H horse program projects include: horse bowl, three creative writing events, judging, public speaking, demonstration and hippology contests; county, district and state horse shows; horsemanship camps, retreats, schools and clinics; trail rides, cumulative record competition; and six artistic expression events.

Impact beyond North Carolina: In 2006, 4-H’ers submitted 19,863 projects, a 17.3 percent increase above 2005, which ranked North Carolina second nationally in traditional club project numbers.

The program’s educational merit and impact are evidenced by the continued success of North Carolina 4-H’ers competing in national educational contests. In 2006, North Carolina 4-H’ers earned 140 team and individual top-team awards and the most team and individual national contest championships (13) of any state.

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