

# 4-H Urban-Rural Exchange

## *Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide*

### *Oregon Youth as Catalysts for a Sustainable Future*

Oregon is a state of great socioeconomic and geographic diversity. While this diversity brings strength, it also challenges Oregonians to meet the needs of all communities. This divide is most deeply felt around natural resource management issues. Oregon cities are now so culturally isolated from the country that clashes between urban and rural Oregon occur frequently when it comes to grazing, logging, wilderness and wildlife. That was the world Portland urban youth walked into when they took a stand in defense of wolves in 2005 at a public Fish and Wildlife hearing. Ranchers reacted in angry protest.

Yet, just as it seemed Oregon's urban-rural divide had grown into an unbridgeable chasm this conflict ended when 4-H stepped in. Along with a handful of ranchers from rural Grant County, 4-H staff from urban and rural Oregon did the unexpected. They invited kids from

Portland's Sunnyside Environmental Middle school to live and work along side rural host families and see a rancher or farmer's side of life.

Today the program continues and is helping bridge the urban-rural divide. 4-H Urban-Rural Exchange involves youth as a catalyst for change for a sustainable Oregon future by providing a venue for rural and urban families to share their stories, their lifestyles, their beliefs and their practices for managing the land for the next generation. It also provides youth who are too often exposed to viewpoints on one side of an issue, a first hand experience on the land. It is this experience of being on the land and walking in the shoes of their host family that youth can begin to understand more deeply how and why Oregonians manage the land the way they do.



Map of Oregon shows current participating counties



## Program Impacts

Outcome evaluations indicated significant changes in attitude, knowledge and understanding of the socioeconomic and environmental issues from both sides of the divide. A four year evaluation found changes in knowledge and attitudes among both urban and rural participants. 119 urban participants and 43 rural host family members participated in the study.

Urban participants reported significant changes in attitudes in:

- 1) Knowing about the lifestyles, beliefs and ways of living of rural Oregonians;
- 2) Understanding the beliefs and practices for managing the land by rural Oregonians;
- 3) How the actions of urban Oregonians impact rural Oregon natural resource management;
- 4) Their awareness of rural Oregon stereotypes;
- 5) Knowing the commonalities urban and rural Oregonians have in managing their land;
- 6) Their belief that ranchers have a respect and understanding of how to best manage their land.

Rural participants reported significant changes as well in:

- 1) Knowing about the lifestyles, beliefs and ways of urban youth;
- 2) Their belief that most urban Oregonians are open to hearing all sides of natural resource issues;
- 3) Their awareness of urban Oregon stereotypes;
- 4) Their belief that urban Oregonians have a respect and understanding of how to best manage urban natural resources.

Today Oregon's urban middle school youth work alongside ranchers and farmers from rural eastern Oregon to learn the joys and challenges that comes with real rural life. Urban youth help ranchers with caring and feeding livestock, vaccinating animals, branding cattle, chopping wood, and cleaning barns to name a few of the daily living chores. Urban youth also attend a local school for the day.

Rural middle school youth in turn visit Portland and learn about the joys and challenges of urban life. Rural youth live and

work alongside urban families and explore issues relevant to Portland such as transportation, greenspaces preservation, urban agriculture and water management. Rural youth also use public transportation, visit farmers markets and community gardens, and tour a waste treatment plant and a recycling center. They also attend an urban school for a day.

In five years, twenty-one 5-day exchanges for over 600 urban and rural participants have been held since the first exchange in 2006.



## Program Participation

- 600 urban and rural Oregonians have participated in this program since it began in 2005.
- Twenty-one 5-6 day exchanges have been held.
- 55 rural host families have hosted 164 youth and 28 adult chaperons in their homes.
- Twenty-eight youth and 8 adult chaperons have attended two or more exchanges and 25 rural host families have hosted rural youth two or more times.
- Twenty-three urban host families have hosted 32 rural youth and 5 rural chaperons.
- A total of 371 family members from urban and rural Oregon have participated in the program.

To learn more about the program, our sponsors and partners, or how to become involved, please contact us:

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4-H is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills.

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Photos: Lynn Ketchum