Program is on Target
District Helps Counties Form Shooting Sports, Judging Teams

OAKLEY, Kan. – Displaying patience not typical of many 16-year-olds, Gaige Jacobus locked in on his target, took a deep breath, and gently squeezed the trigger.

“Low, and to the right,” said his father, Dwight, looking 40 yards down the range.

Gaige was sighting his rifle leading up to the Logan County Fair shooting sports match. It was a scene repeated numerous times as five young shooters took part in the rifle division under the watchful eye of Dwight and his wife, Lisa.

“We are trying to get more kids interested; we have about 20-25 kids that come to shooting sports practices,” Lisa Jacobus said.

The Jacobus’ are the go-to family in Logan County 4-H shooting sports, having volunteered their time for more than a decade. In 2011, when Gove County residents voted to join the Golden Prairie Extension District, the Jacobus’ saw a bump in the number of kids they could help.

“We have kids from Trego County and Gove County go to Oakley to do the shoots,” said R. Scott ’Bronc’ Barrows, director of the Golden Prairie district. “We are able to build on their (Jacobus’) expertise, whereas before, shooting sports struggled a little bit in Trego County.”

In Kansas, between 3,000 and 3,500 4-Hers participate in shooting sports each year, according to statistics from the Kansas 4-H office in Manhattan. Among all 4-H projects, it ranks seventh in number of participants.

“We’re one of the few states out of 34 entered at nationals that had a full team,” Gaige Jacobus said.

But until recently, the individual counties in the Golden Prairie district were often not able to field a full team for state competitions. Lisa Jacobus said the new structure increases the likelihood that the district will always have a team.

“Being able to put those counties together, you can make a team,” she said. “When you go to a meet, if you don’t have a full team, you have less chance to get a team award.”

Barrows sees districting as an advantage for many youth programs, noting that the Golden Prairie district also was recently able to field a horse judging team with team members from three counties.

Lisa Jacobus added that the district helps with paying for certification of adult and junior volunteers;

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entry fees to shooting matches; and providing volunteers.

“We’ve had more [extension] agents helping us out and we can get more kids involved if we had more hours in the day,” she said.

“The kids get really involved with each other once they get to know each other, and it has benefitted them by having these activities together.”

A 4-H volunteer gives instructions prior to the start of the 4-H shooting sports match at the Logan County Fair in 2012. Kids receive training in firearm safety, and contests are under close supervision by trained adults.