POSITION STATEMENT FOR MINNESOTA 4-H MULTI-COUNTY TEAMS
Knowledge Bowl and Judging Contests

Minnesota 4-H enjoys strong interest in Quiz Bowl and Judging Contest programs. In 2005, just over 400 youth participated in State Fair judging contests in General Livestock, Dairy, Rabbits and Consumer Decisions. Another 300 participated in Horse Judging and Horse Hippology at the State 4-H Horse Show. Quiz Bowl numbers have grown to over 200 teams participating in one of four regional contests. In 2005, over 1,000 youth participated in Bowls.

Two primary factors appear to influence the trends in participation numbers: 1) enrollment figures in the project areas and 2) longevity of each program. In the case of judging teams, participation has declined consistent with project enrollment numbers. An emphasis in coaches training did result in a 10% increase in overall judging team participation from 2004 to 2005. The Bowl program in Minnesota is about 20 years old. And while participation has somewhat flattened in the past few year, there has been steady growth since the program's inception.

Multi-County Teams in both the Judging Program and the Bowl Program have been allowed for a number of years. For the Judging Program, multi-county teams were allowed so that counties with minimal enrollment could offer the same educational opportunities as counties with large enrollment numbers. In Bowls, multi-county teams were begun to expose a maximum number of counties to the program quickly. However today, some counties have formed multi-county teams due to minimal enrollment. Philosophically, Minnesota 4-H believes in the county club program. Many states have moved toward state teams comprised of the “top four performers” regardless of county affiliation. Minnesota 4-H history and philosophy, though, results in county and multicounty team participation.

**Minnesota 4-H does support multi-county teams that are combined to provide bowl or judging experience to youth that would not, otherwise, be able to have these educational opportunities. Minnesota 4-H does not support the “stacking” of a multi-county team for the sole purpose of winning.** These ideals are impossible to place in the rules that guide these programs. Consistency can only be accomplished if all partners – coaches, youth, parents and staff – play by the same “unwritten rules.”

Counties should first try to field a team on their own. And if that is not possible, they are encouraged to work with other county/counties to field a team. It is not appropriate for coaches to offer opportunities to selected youth. Opportunities must be offered to all youth from a given county, regardless of experience or ability. Practices must be equally communicated to all members in a given project. Likewise, youth and parents should not look for multi-county team options unless there has been an honest attempt to interest county youth in opportunities. The role of 4-H staff is to monitor the process so that equal learning opportunities are equally communicated to all potential families.

- If County programs meet these criteria by universally offering practices and working together as a team during the practice season, a multi-county team is permitted.
- 4-Hers will have a more positive experience if they remain in the age/grade category for which they are eligible. Thus, a county is not expected to move younger 4-Hers up to a senior team just to form a county team.
- Counties will need to assess the “history” of the team members when they consider combining teams. For example, if a 4-Her has a "history" of practicing with a group of 4-Hers from another county for multiple years they will not be expected to split away from that multi-county team simply because younger 4-Hers from his/her county become old enough to judge in the senior category or because additional and lesser experienced members from his/her county begin to attend practices.

**If there is evidence that multi-county teams are formed for the primary purpose of winning (stacking teams) and that promotion of educational opportunities was not equally communicated to all enrolled members, contest leadership, with the support of the Center for 4-H Youth Development can expunge Regional/State Contest results and deny national contest participation.**

Questions regarding formation of county teams should be directed to Regional Educators.
Prepared October, 2005
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