

USU Extension 4-H Meat Donation Program Tops 1 Million Pounds

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This year marks the 11th year of the Utah State University Extension 4-H Meat Donation Program, and to date, the program has brought in more than 1 million pounds of meat and food items to Utah Food Bank for families in need.

The program began in 2005 when the Farmington 4-H Lamb Club gave a few hundred pounds of meat to charity as their service project. Kelly Maxfield, their 4-H club leader, vice president of IT and administration for Questar Corp., and now Utah Food Bank board of directors member, got help from his corporate connections, and donations came in from many northern Utah counties to pay for the meat.

"Now it not only involves 4-H youth, but many other people who donate trucking, packing, fuel and time to the project," said Justen Smith, USU Extension associate professor in Davis County. "This year, 180,000 pounds of meat and other food items were donated from Cache, Davis, Salt Lake, Wasatch, Morgan, Weber and Tooele counties to distribute to the 444,000 Utahns in need with the help of approximately 150 volunteers. It's amazing how the program has grown."

The project works so well because donors raise enough money to buy 4-H livestock sold at county and state fair auctions and livestock shows over the course of about four months, Smith said. The auction "floor price" goes to the 4-Hers, and the meat goes to the food bank, so everyone wins. Now, every fall, volunteers from all over the state help sort and package the thousands of pounds of meat donated to Utah Food Bank. The meat is then distributed

by the food bank's 134 partnering agencies throughout the state.

"One of the major aspects of the 4-H program is community service," Smith said. "It is great to team up with other agencies that need our help in an area where we can make a real difference. Our youth are not only getting the opportunity for service now, but they are also learning the importance of being good citizens."

Maxfield said it is a great feeling to see the culmination of the project since it began in 2005.

"Who knew when we started this program with just a couple of 4-H kids that it would grow into such a huge program where we have so many kids and so many businesses involved?" he said. "It's very gratifying to see us reach the million pound mark. We'll shoot to get to 2 million and hopefully we will get there more quickly than we got to a million now that we've got the ball rolling. It's a great opportunity for the kids to serve and businesses to serve and give back and help feed hungry people at the same time."

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