2021 Impact

Educator Becky Hutchings was the recipient of the 2021 Outstanding Service Award from the Idaho Family and Consumer Sciences Educator Association. She was also invited by the Eastern Idaho State Fair (EISF) committee to teach two presentations at the 2021 EISF in Blackfoot. Both classes were well attended with over 750 people. She continues to teach and produce live videos for the Cooking Under Pressure Facebook page to teach healthy cooking options. The page currently has 495 members, about 75 more than last year. This page presently hosts 28 videos and over 300 written files along with photos that contain recipes, tips and tricks.

Educator Jason Thomas continues to investigate the usage of barn owls to manage vole populations. During the 2021 nesting season, barn owls living in monitored boxes consumed an estimated 134,568 voles. Thomas also continues work on his educational board game, Pest Friends, which is progressing well and has received a large grant to continue this work. Thomas also manages the Idaho Insect Identification website where he and another entomologist assist farmers and homeowners in the identification of insects and other arthropods.

4-H in Minidoka County

In July 2021, UI Extension, Minidoka County received two major ARPA grants to enhance 4-H programming. The first grant of $80,000 was awarded to increase the access of STEAM programming to youth ages 5-13. With this grant, which is still ongoing, 3,383 additional youth have been reached, learning about a variety of topics including entomology, Lego robotics, engineering, food science, art and other topics. Another ARPA grant for $35,000 was awarded to Thomas to increase the availability of entomology programming across the state. Through this grant he has put on multiple in-services and trained other individuals how to teach bug programs to youth. He has also reached an additional 1,000 youth across the state. 84% of surveyed youth indicated they had a more positive opinion of insects and spiders following the training and 83% wanted to learn more about these topics.

On the Horizon

Thomas has received a $100,000 Western SARE grant from the USDA to help expand the Pest Friends board game he created with Grant Loomis during the pandemic. The game has been play tested by over 200 individuals. With the help of this grant, Thomas will be producing over 600 copies of the game, improving the artwork and developing a program to help teachers use this tool.