

# **Guide to Starting S.A.F.E. Programs with Georgia 4-H**

## **What is S.A.F.E.**

Project S.A.F.E. (Shooting Awareness, Fun and Education) is an active program designed to assist young people in personal development; to help establish a personal environmental ethic and explore life-long vocational and avocational activities. The program uses experiential learning and positive interactions with youth and adult role models to help young people develop self-concept, self-assurance and a positive self-image through participation in safe and ethical shooting sports activities.

## **Programs Available**

22 Rimfire Sporter (*Seniors, 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades*)

Air Pistol (*Juniors and Seniors, 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades*)

Air Rifle (*Sporter for Juniors and Seniors 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades and Precision for Seniors, 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades*)

Archery (*Recurve and Compound for Cloverleaf, Juniors and Seniors, 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades*)

BB (*Cloverleaf and Juniors, 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades*)

Shotgun (*Modified Trap and Trap / Skeet for Juniors and Seniors, 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades*)

## **Who Leads the Program**

Project S.A.F.E. Clubs are primarily volunteer led and involvement by county Extension staff varies greatly from program to program. Different models work better in some counties than in others. The most important factor is communication between county Extension staff and the volunteers leading the program. Program leaders may be parents or other adults in the community. They do not have to be expert marksman to become involved, but rather an adult that is interested in seeing youngsters develop and participate in the sport.

## **Program Models**

S.A.F.E. programs are mainly conducted in two ways, either as an additional county 4-H activity or a standalone special interest club. The model that is used is not as important as ensuring that S.A.F.E. Programs focus on the four essential elements of youth development: Mastery, Belonging, Independence and Generosity. If the focus of our programs is not the development of youth, then they are just another shooting activity that is being done without any real purpose or goals.

Programs that are ran as additional 4-H activities are targeted to those young people that are already involved in 4-H. They are participating in other 4-H activities like project achievement, local club meetings, judging teams, community service projects and leadership opportunities where the four essential elements of youth development are met. As an additional activity, they give 4-H'ers an opportunity to master new skills while participating with other youth that share their interest.

Special interest clubs are targeted to those youth that are typically not involved in 4-H through other areas. The S.A.F.E. program is their 4-H club and the program must offer opportunities for all four essential elements to be met. These programs do take a little more planning and creativity to ensure that the needs of youth are met in the areas of Independence and Generosity by planning opportunities for young people to develop citizenship and leadership skills.

### **S.A.F.E. Programs and Competitive Events**

Competitive events have long been used by 4-H to motivate and encourage young people to get involved in 4-H projects and educational experiences. However, the focus of 4-H programs should always be placed on a young person achieving his/her individual goals and working towards mastering the skills involved with the project. For many young people, the skills learned and the chance to belong to a group that shares their interest in shooting sports is more important than any event or competition that they could attend. For this reason, many young people and county programs elect not to participate in the competitive events offered through the S.A.F.E. program. It is important that counties let young people select their own level of competition, if any.

### **How to Get Started**

Project S.A.F.E. Clubs, like other 4-H activities do take a lot of effort to get started. As the old saying goes, "anything worth doing is worth doing right." The success of a program relies greatly on the planning and preparation before the first 4-H'er steps through the door. Programs can be initiated by county staff or volunteers. However, communication between volunteers and staff is the number one factor in having a successful program. Following is a suggested guide on how to either start a new S.A.F.E. program or re-energized a current program.

1. Identify key leaders or a team of adults that are interested in shooting sports, youth, and beginning an opportunity in your county. Conservation officers, hunter's education instructors, and local sporting club members are a good place to start. But don't forget parents and other 4-H volunteers that just have an interest in working with youth. Just as we can help those adults that have knowledge of a sport learn to work with and develop young people, we can also help those adults that already know the ins and outs of 4-H learn to support youth

in the sport of shooting. Truth be known, some of the best S.A.F.E. coaches have learned right along side of the 4-H'ers they work with.

2. Invite potential leaders to an initial meeting to discuss options for a county program. During this meeting, you will want to try to answer two important questions:
  - a. What age group do you want to target? The target 4-H audience should be one of the first things that is considered. Is your goal to develop a program to attract and retain older young people in 4-H? Or is your goal to establish a program for younger kids that you can continue to grow through 4-H? By the time students reach middle and high school age, they are pretty well committed to the extra curriculum activities that they participate in. Although they want to try new things, they simply may not have the time to devote. Elementary students are always searching for new things. At this age, they also begin to identify those sports they love and want to participate in. Not to mention, elementary school students seem to always travel with an eager volunteer force . . . parents.
  - b. What resources are available and what discipline would be the best to start within your county? Take time to assess the needs of youth, parents and your community. Just because you have adults interested in starting an archery program, your 4-H'ers may be interested in BB or some other shooting sport.
3. Before going another step, take the time to have all new potential volunteers to complete a volunteer leader application, collect references and complete the 4-H adult leader screening guidelines. Don't worry about completing Overnight Chaperone Training. We will take care of that later.
4. Put together a county team and register at least two adults to attend the Certified S.A.F.E. Coaches Training in the discipline you have identified to begin in your county. At the training, adult leaders will receive an introduction to the 4-H S.A.F.E. program, learn basic guidelines for planning a program, complete Overnight Chaperone Training, and learn how to coach youth in the selected discipline. The training is open to adult leaders, including Extension staff, which will be working with your program.
5. Following the training, new certified coaches should meet with Extension staff to digest what was learned before going forward. There is a lot of information given during the training and some time is needed to help sort out what is best for your own program.
6. Develop your Action Plan. Where are you going to conduct your program? How will it be funded? How will you recruit youth and adults to participate? What activities are you going to offer? Who is in charge of what duties? Your Action Plan is your road map. Have you ever tried to get some place new without

directions? Coaches attending the training will be provided with a sample Action Plan that they can bring back to the county to help develop your own plan.

7. Recruit additional adult involvement as needed and youth members.
8. Hold an organizational meeting for youth and parents. This is the best time to explain to both youth and parents what is involved and what they will be doing in the program. During the organizational meeting, enrollment forms can be completed and initial safety instruction can be done with the youth. But don't forget the parents. Shooting sports is a family sport. Take time to let the parents know how they can get involved with and help support their young person.
9. Carry out your Action Plan.

For more information on starting S.A.F.E. Programs, contact:

Craven Hudson  
Extension 4-H Specialist  
322 Hoke Smith Annex, UGA  
Athens, GA 30602  
706-542-5667 or [cfhudson@uga.edu](mailto:cfhudson@uga.edu)