February 25, 1999

To: Extension Educators  
   County 4-H Contacts

From: Karen Hinton  
       Dean and Director

Re: Helmet policy

It has come to my attention that questions have arisen regarding wearing helmets while participating in county 4-H horse project activities. In 1997, the Show Board established the following rule: “All 4-H participants are required to wear a properly fitted ASM-SEI rated helmet with harness while handling or riding a horse at the State Horse Show.”

In June of 1997, UCCSN Assistant General Counsel, Marc Cardinali, issued an opinion regarding the implementation of the rule at the county level. In his memo, he stated that “As an entity of the State of Nevada and the UCCSN and as a sponsor of the event, UNR Cooperative Extension is obligated and mandated to follow the helmet rules. This rule is for the protection of the rider and a necessary risk management tool required under state rules.”

I understand that there are strong feelings about western traditions relating to horse events. However, it is essential that we make the safety of 4-H participants and our volunteers a top priority. Risk management is critical to maintaining a safe environment in all aspects of club meetings, activities and contests and is essential for the ongoing success of the 4-H program. In Washoe County, last year, a 4-H member was thrown from her horse. Her head struck a metal fence. Fortunately, she was wearing a helmet and was uninjured. If we had not taken steps to manage the risk, the consequences could have been dire.

If your county has not already begun to implement this rule, please do so immediately. Failing to manage this type of risk can place employees, volunteers and the University in a position of legal vulnerability.

Cc: Sue Hoffman  
    Area Directors  
    Administrative Office