

# 4-H Shooting Sports: *Shotgun and the Clover Clays*



## 4-H Shooting Sports

Shotgun is one of the most enjoyable disciplines of the 4-H Shooting Sports program, and it continues to grow in participation every year. Around our state, 4-H participants break thousands of clay targets with practiced accuracy and their favorite shotguns.

Young people are attracted to this sport for several challenges it offers: 4-H'ers might hope to achieve a personal goal of consecutive targets hit, or perhaps the participants desire top recognition in their district event. Both are worthy of the 4-H'ers' time and effort.

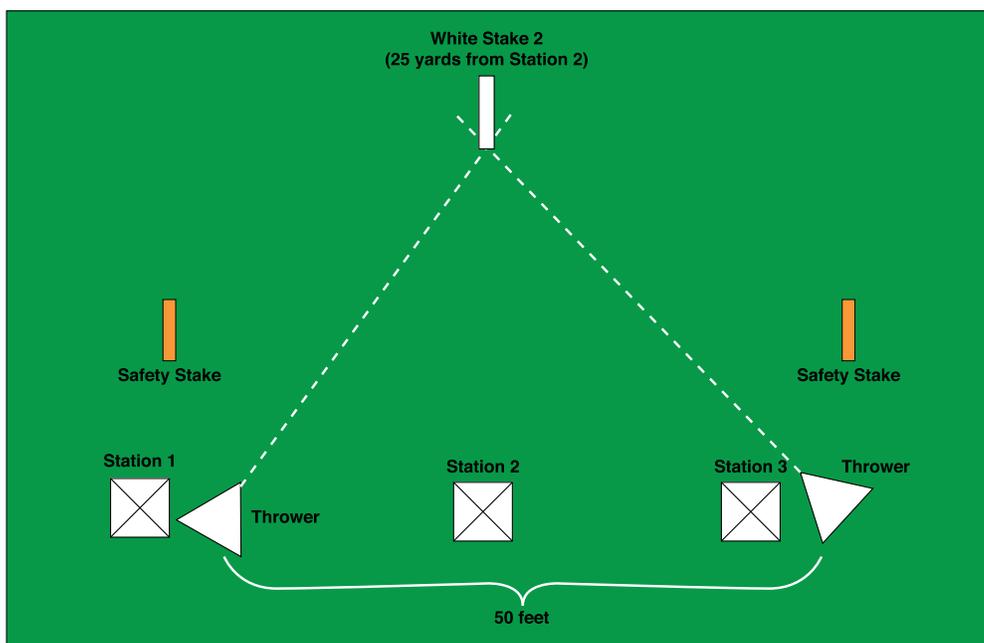
Because the 4-H Shooting Sports program is about youth development, it uses a stepwise approach to teaching skills; young people are taught based on their age and their physical, mental, and cognitive abilities. Starting at age 10 and going through to the age of 18 (4-H age), 4-H'ers can participate in the shotgun discipline. Instructors begin with simple shooting exercises designed to teach a cumulative lesson of successfully making the first shot. This last step is as critical as the first.

Instructors should attempt to leave the young person with a sense of achievement at the end of each lesson. The goal should be to keep the student interested and bring them back to learn more. Instructors should give themselves time to step into their roles of leading and teaching. To further the success of the 4-H'ers, it is important that instructors focus on directing learning in engaging ways without losing students' attention. Remember, the program is about developing and challenging young people.

Each lesson can be broken down into three simple steps:

1. **Safety:** Make sure the learning environment is safe; this includes physical safety, but it also extends to overall safety. Overall safety involves the young people feeling *safe* to share and engage in the activity, free from fear of embarrassment or criticism.
2. **Fun:** Make sure each practice session or competition is enjoyable. Young people will lose confidence in themselves and their abilities if they are not having a good time while participating in the activities.
3. **Education:** If the first two steps are adhered to, the learning environment allows for the educational component of the program to take place.

At the local and district levels, 4-H'ers are taught and participate in the clover clay course, which is a modified sporting clay course that involves three stations. The following diagram is taken from the *2017 4-H Shooting Sports Event Handbook* (Extension Publication 2752).



**Note:** Throwers should be set to throw across the white stake at the same level—about 20 feet high. Stations 1 and 3 should be set up 4–5 feet to the left of the throwers. The orange stakes are safety stakes. **They should be positioned 25 feet from Stations 1 and 3 and offset 7 feet outbound.** When a shooter is at any station, his or her gun should never pass behind the orange stakes. Use paint to make a box on the ground at each station. It should be big enough for the shooter's foot to fit inside.

Here is the target presentation participants will see in a contest:

**From Station 1:** First target from closest thrower; second target from farthest thrower; one pair of doubles (one from each thrower at the same time); fifth target is a rabbit\* from farthest thrower.

**From Station 2:** First target from left thrower; second target from right thrower; one pair of doubles (one from each thrower at the same time); fifth target is a rabbit\* from shooter's choice of thrower.

**From Station 3:** First target from closest thrower; second target from farthest thrower; one pair of doubles (one from each thrower at the same time); fifth target is a rabbit\* from farthest thrower.

*\*Note:* Rabbit targets must be broken before passing the white stake that marks the center of the course. Rabbit targets that are shot at after passing the white stake will be counted as misses. However, course of fire will be the same as the 2006 rule, which permits flight targets instead of rabbits where range configuration precludes throwing rabbit targets. See the *2017 4-H Shooting Sports Event Handbook* (Extension Publication 2752).

Practice is a critical point to success in the clover clay course. A good place to start before stepping onto a fully laid-out course would be to see single-target presentation from one machine. This does two things: it settles the nerves a new participant may feel as they call "pull!" for the target, and it allows the young person to relax into a steady rhythm. Getting used to seeing where the target is on the line of sight is important.

After several presentations, have the student mount the gun (unloaded) to their shoulder and follow a few targets in flight. This works on hand/eye coordination and will make target acquisition, along with follow-through after the shot, second nature to the student. Follow-through is very important in the process; it keeps the shooter on target if another shot is needed.

Practicing trigger control is extremely important. The trigger on a shotgun is meant to be pulled quickly—not squeezed as with a rifle. Pulling the trigger should be a quick movement, and participants should retain fluid motion in the finger.

The least important of all the steps is actually firing the gun. After practicing the previous steps, firing will become second nature, as it is a response to the eye/hand alignment on the target. You can pull the trigger all day long, but if you are not pointing the gun in the correct direction, then your shot will never break the target. During these pre-live-fire exercises, you may have some targets break on impact, but usually the clays can be retrieved and reused. Before reusing them, carefully inspect any unbroken targets to check for any hairline cracks and determine whether they are indeed solid enough to be used again.

With a little practice and perseverance, you will be breaking targets in no time. Remember that it takes time to become a precise shooter. However, once you get the hang of the clover clay course, you'll enjoy many hours of yelling, "PULL!" Good luck, have fun, and break those targets to bits!

## Glossary

**Clay:** A round, concave, orange disk made of asphalt that is launched from the thrower as a target. **Never refer to clays as "birds."**

**Clover clays:** A modified course of fire that is derived from the Sporting Clays Shotgun Event.

**Follow-through:** The method of keeping the barrel of the gun in motion while still retaining target acquisition.

**Pull:** The command given by the shooter for the target to be thrown from the machine.

**Rabbit:** Similar to flight targets; the rabbit target is a round, orange disk that is thrown from the trap machine so that it bounces along the ground in a straight line.

**Station:** A location on the range where the participant stands to view the course of fire for that location.

**Shooter's choice:** The participant may choose a single target from one of the two outside throwers.

**Thrower:** A spring-loaded device in which the clay targets are loaded and released upon the shooter's command.

**4-H age:** The age of a 4-H participant as of January 1 of the year in which he/she participates.

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