



## THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

### **4-H: Empowering Young People with the Skills to Lead for a Lifetime**

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Chairman Koehler, Vice Chairman Creech, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee, my name is Kirk Bloir. It is my honor to serve Ohio State Extension (OSU Extension) in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) as Assistant Director, 4-H Youth Development, 4-H Program Leader. A proud 4-H alum from Williams County, I began my career in OSU Extension in Madison County in 1996.

Before I talk about 4-H's history and the impact of COVID-19, I would like to provide some food for thought. Ohio 4-H alumni are four times more likely to make positive contributions to their community. They are 10% more likely to have a college degree and almost two times more likely to get good grades in school. Since 2014, 4-H project enrollment has increased in areas that build the skills needed to be successful in careers and in college. Consistent with the DeWine administration's goals, 4-H youth are two times more likely to participate in STEM activities outside of school.

4-H is the nation's positive youth development program, embedded in land-grant institutions' Cooperative Extension Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. At Ohio State University (OSU), 4-H is one of four core program areas of OSU Extension within CFAES. 4-H advances youth development through its four H's:

- Head (cognition),
- Heart (social-emotional),
- Hands (service, citizenship), and
- Health (physical and mental).

The prototype of what would come to be known as 4-H took root in Clark County, Ohio, in 1902 thanks to the pioneering efforts of Albert B. Graham. With the support of local business leaders, teachers and parents, Graham brought boys and girls of all backgrounds together to do experiments in agriculture. From the beginning, Graham's clubs were both integrated and open to both genders. Pictures of his early clubs show boys and girls, both black and white, side by side and partners in the pursuit of hands-on learning.

In the fall of 1904, Ohio had 16 clubs in 10 counties, with 644 total members. In April 1905, the OSU Board of Trustees appointed Graham as Ohio State's first superintendent of agricultural extension. Graham led efforts to institutionalize the creation of educational materials boys and girls could use, with guidance and support from trusted adults, to deepen their knowledge and skills through hands-on learning, resulting in their own mastery of the content. These foundational elements continue to provide an organizational framework for today's 4-H programming.

After Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, which created the nation's Cooperative Extension Service (CES), USDA looked to the nation's land-grant institutions for proven outreach leaders. They saw an ideal hire in Graham. Drawing on his years of extension leadership at OSU, at USDA he helped shape the fledgling national CES and his boys' and girls' club model quickly took root throughout the nation. The Ohio-grown and OSU-endorsed community 4-H club model became a proven delivery mechanism to help the nation continue to improve agricultural and domestic science practices that resulted in increased production to help ensure a safe, dependable, abundant food supply.

Graham's vision, combined with the land-grant DNA of OSU and ongoing public commitment to continue to fund positive youth development work in every county across the state, have allowed the 4-H program to remain consistently true to core philosophical beliefs about engaging youth in hands-on learning while remaining relevant through continual adaptation and evolution to meet the current needs of "today's" youth. With firm grounding in agriculture, which serves as a continual connection with the power of growth, perseverance, and renewal, 4-H as an integral part of CFAES, is helping to make the land-grant mission a living reality.

OSU Extension 4-H Youth Development has many partnerships that help us reach youth across the state. A few examples include the Ohio National Guard with the Ohio Military Kids program (OMK) to support Ohio's military families; Five Rivers MetroParks in Dayton, with the Adventure Central program that uses an environmental foundation to engage urban youth in experiential learning that promotes social, emotional, and physical health alongside other efforts aimed at supporting academic and life success; and County Agricultural Societies in all 88 counties and the Ohio State Fair to promote youth activities through educational demonstrations, public speaking, and competitions.

The 4-H program currently serves youth through many delivery settings—clubs, after-school programs, camps (overnight and day camps), and school enrichment. Community clubs are the cornerstone of 4-H programs as they provide consistent exposure and structure to foster positive youth development. Particular attention is given to the inclusion of essential elements in all delivery settings to bring about positive youth development:

- 1) a positive relationship with a caring adult (youth learn and develop in adult leader-directed environments that are caring, supportive, and fun;
- 2) an inclusive environment (using learning techniques for the youth to work as team and with others while valuing and respecting the diversity of all participants);
- 3) a safe emotional and physical environment (meeting the needs of the youth where they are emotionally, physically, socially, and cognitively);

- 4) opportunity for mastery (allowing for creativity following the experiential learning cycle through the activities);
- 5) engagement in learning (using fun, positive experiences across many subject areas);
- 6) opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future (encouraging choices, decision-making, and leadership roles and exploring future career interests);
- 7) opportunity for self-determination (promoting activities that contribute to intrinsic motivations); and
- 8) opportunity to value and practice service to others (engaging in volunteer and civic activities in youths' local communities).

The target audience for the OSU Extension 4-H program today are youth ages 5 to 19 years old. The 4-H Cloverbud program is designed to be developmentally age appropriate for children ages 5 to 8 years. Even though the youth are clearly the focus of the 4-H program, the volunteers and professionals who are involved in the planning, delivering, and evaluating of the program are essential for success.

A snapshot of OSU's 4-H program can be measured by the number of participants, volunteers, and support professionals. Enrollment data from 2019 (pre COVID) indicate that 171,983 Ohio youth (about evenly split between girls, 53%, and boys, 47%) participated in clubs, group, and special interest programs. 4-H club membership totaled 68,517 youth, while 12,079 youth were involved in 4-H camping programs. A total of 16,114 adult volunteer leaders were active in 4-H and 6,819 youth also volunteered their time. More than 150 4-H professionals provided leadership at the local and state levels and include extension educators, program assistants/coordinators/managers, and state specialists.

Content-oriented projects are selected by 4-H youth each year. Of the more than a quarter million 4-H projects were completed in 2019:

- 80,245 were in animal sciences, including market livestock;
- 13,789 focused on healthy lifestyles;
- 15,141 were in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and
- 14,267 were on citizenship/civics.

Each of these categories contains numerous projects related to each general content areas.

COVID-19 has impacted 4-H much in the same way it has impacted many other organizations across the state: our employees, volunteers, and members have been creative and innovative in responding to doing our part to slow the spread so that our health care providers and system would not be completely overwhelmed with patients. When we needed to stay at home, county 4-H professionals pivoted from working at the office to working at home, shifting from in-person to on-line platforms and technologies, such as Zoom, Face Book Live, Google Hangout, YouTube, Flipgrid, and many others to continue to support positive youth development. From working with club advisors to schedule and host zoom club meetings, to partnering with county senior fair boards to support junior fairs with online quality assurance training, virtual and in-person project judging, to supporting youth mental health and career

awareness and workforce development, we continued to provide opportunities for youth to develop the skills they need to lead for a lifetime.

4-H was resilient, our educators still had a significant impact on our ability to serve their respective communities. Their hard work and adaptability played a major role in helping most communities proceed with Junior Fair activities. Without the commitment of our talented 4-H educators, and valued support of local senior fairboard volunteers, this would not have been possible. 4-H members and families appreciate the additional financial supports from relief funds that were provided to local senior fairboards, allowing them to have the ability to purchase needed COVID supplies for cleaning, sanitizing, signage, PPE, etc.

COVID-19 clearly impacted the number of participants in 4-H in 2020. Approximately, 63,909 youths participated through local clubs, down 4,608 from 2019. Another 18,619 participated through affiliated school districts, the closure of classroom activities resulted in 55,858 less participants than in 2019. 4-H Camps were also hard hit. In 2020, there were 800 virtual campers. This is down from 12,079 4-H campers in 2019. COVID concerns and lack of camping revenue, as well as the cancellation of the other groups using 4-H camp facilities, has resulted in financial hardships for our 4-H camp facilities. Through cost saving measures and additional philanthropic gifts, our affiliated camp facility volunteer boards have weathered the 2020 COVID storm.

COVID-19 also put a spotlight on the very real digital divide that negatively impacts so many Ohioans and 4-Hers across the state. The DeWine administration commitment and unprecedented investment in expanding broadband access will help bridge the divide to provide infrastructure needed to continue to fuel Ohio's economic growth.

There is some silver lining in the data, in 2020 STEAM projects have grown to 42,129. The number has grown by 26,988 in 2020. Citizenship programs also followed a similar trend, growing by 12,245 to 26,512.

The impact of Ohio State University's 4-H program is perhaps best expressed by 4-H youth voices. Once such youth voice is 4-H member Ava Loneman, who was selected by National 4-H Council as a winner of the "Youth In Action Pillar Award" for STEM. She was recognized nationally for establishing herself as a leading youth advocate and organizer for STEM education, reaching more than 1,600 youth with hands-on programming in three years by founding the Bio-Med Science Academy 4 H Afterschool Makers Club.

The strength of OSU's 4-H program is that it meets the needs of the youth and their communities at the local level while supporting the national mission of 4-H's guiding principles: positive youth development, partnerships, learning, and youth potential. Working together with tens of thousands of volunteers, OSU Extension 4-H, and with continued financial support from our federal, state, and local funders, we inspire kids with purpose and help them grow to be respectful, hardworking, resilient, responsible, inventive, and compassionate young adults – prepared to navigate the world ahead and improve it for the betterment of us all.

I would like to close by thanking you for your support of CFAES, OSU Extension, and our partners in county government. The Cooperative Extension line item in the Ohio budget helps fund the work of our educators. We look forward to continuing our role in developing Ohio's youth.

Portions adapted from:

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