

General Club Information

4-H Clubs

How can I get a 4-H club/group organized?

Your local 4-H staff will work with you to help organize a new 4-H club. Host a meeting with the young people who are interested and the adults who are willing to help. Publicize it through the school or any place young people and their parents can be reached. Often, your 4-H office will have 4-H promotion materials available.

What do we do at the first meeting?

Get acquainted and have fun with a group mixer and refreshments. Talk about and demonstrate projects the group might like or be interested in learning. Give this part some thought beforehand, and talk with the 4-H agent or an experienced 4-H leader. You might also involve some 4-H'ers to talk about what they do. Also discuss when, where, and how often the group will meet.

What about officers?

A 4-H Club is an organization that young people belong to where they have fun and learn together. Clubs may have officers and whatever committees they need to run the business and activities of the club. 4-H has materials available for presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, treasurers, news reporters, recreation leaders, health and safety chairpersons and song leaders. The club may have more or fewer officers, depending on its own needs. It is a good idea to wait for several meetings to elect officers so members know each other.

Who names a club?

The members of the club do, with the help of their leader.

How often do 4-H clubs meet?

Some clubs meet every week and some meet once or twice a month all year long. It depends on the group and what it wants to do. 4-H clubs may organize at any time of the year. Sometimes members have to be enrolled in a project by a certain time to be eligible for a specific activity, like a fair. Check this with the county Extension office.

Should 4-H clubs have dues?

There is an annual \$10.00 per member fee for enrolling in 4-H, with a family maximum of \$30.00. Half of the money is used at the state level and half remains in the county to be used for project development and promotion. If a club decides to collect additional dues, the amount should not be so high as to make it difficult for members to pay them and there should be a budgeted purpose for the money.

Where do 4-H clubs meet?

Any place large enough and is convenient for the members of the group. Some clubs meet at leaders' or members'. Some meet in a central place such as a school, church or community room.

How big should a club be?

This depends on the age of members, the places they have to meet, and the leadership available. The ideal club is big enough to have fun together, but small enough for everyone

to feel a part of the group. The average club is typically 10-20 members, with two or three leaders.

What do 4-H'ers do at meetings?

Programs for meetings focus on business, educational, social, and service activities. At club meetings 4-H'ers usually do four kinds of things: project work, business meeting, recreation or social activities, and special-interest programs.

Do they do all those things at one meeting?

Sometimes, after a short business meeting, members work on their projects or have an educational activity, then play a game or two. Other times, the meeting will be devoted entirely to one thing: everyone may bring a dog and practice obedience training; help elect officers and plan the club programs; visit a local historic site, or plant flowers at a local public building.

Who plans the program for the club?

Members of the club. If the club is small, the whole group may make the plans at a meeting. If the club is large, ideas may come from anyone in the club at a meeting. Then a committee puts a program together. It is good to involve parents in these program planning activities of the club or group.

When do clubs meet and how long do meetings last?

This depends on the group. Many clubs meet for an hour or two after school, in the evening, or on Saturdays. The most important thing is to have a regular meeting time, one that members and their families can remember.

What do leaders do at meetings?

Leaders should be in the background at meetings to advise and provide support for members as they conduct their activities. It is important for leaders to work with club officers ahead of time, so that they and the members (not the leaders) are "front and center" during the meetings.

Want to know more about the history of the 4-H program? Visit the [History](#) section of the website!

4-H History

4-H didn't start at any one time 4-H or place, but has developed according to needs of people. It is the result of the work of many people in different parts of the United States who were concerned about young people, and its early history is an example of its cooperative nature. The characteristics of 4-H are unique. From its inception, it tied both public and private resources together for the purpose of helping young people.

Turn-of-the-Century America

Throughout the nineteenth century, rural America set the social tone for the country. As the century turned, the rugged individualism, tempered by the obligations of neighborliness that characterized the settlement of America, was seen as a residue of the past. Young people were moving to cities, drawn by the potential for jobs. They saw no future in laboring behind a plow. Rural America began to lose its young people. Although agricultural prosperity was a characteristic of the turn of the century, the atmosphere of economic prosperity was darkened by the nagging concern for the future generation of rural children.

Contributing Factors

There were two forces that generated the idea of 4-H work. One was the concern for education in rural areas. The beginnings of the 4-H idea of practical or applied educational principles resulted from concern regarding the relevance of public schools to country life. The Morrill Act of 1862 created the land-grant university system, dedicated to general education and the improvement of agriculture and mechanical arts. A principle not then being used in public schools.

The second was a need for advancing agricultural technology. Agricultural production technology was being researched at Experiment Stations established as part of the Land-Grant system. However, the farming community did not readily accept new ideas and techniques.

An Idea Takes Root

Unlike most of the popular and enduring ideas of the time, 4-H was not the result of an idea of a recognized national leader nor of a charismatic personality. Here and there, farm families, agricultural scientists, school teachers, administrators and concerned citizens scattered the seeds that took root as 4-H.

The following time line shows some of the people and experiences that shaped the 4-H movement:

Late 1890's

- Liberty Hyde Bailey at Cornell University linked youth to nature and the rural environment.
- O. J. Kerns at the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station founded Farmers' Institutes to introduce farm and home topics and comparative classes for rural youth.
- Will B. Otwell, working Farmers' Institutes in IL, offered premiums to boys for best corn yields.

Early 1900's

- Seaman A. Knapp was sent to Texas by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help farmers combat the boll weevil. He used demonstration plots to show that applying

theory and technique is a useful way of getting new information to people.

- 1901**
 - A.B. Graham, a school principal in Ohio, began to promote vocational agriculture in rural schools in out-of-school "clubs."

- 1902**
 - Graham formed a club of boys and girls with officers, projects, meetings, and record requirements. He sought assistance of the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station and Ohio State University.

 - The club concept was adopted in Iowa by O.H. Benson in Wright County and Jessie Field Shambaugh in Page county.

 - Wallaces' Farmer magazine sponsored contests for raising corn from high grade seed corn.

- 1903**
 - Knapp's work in Texas resulted in the creation of the USDA Office of Cooperative Demonstration Work.

 - A.F. Meharg was hired as a demonstration agent at Mississippi State College by the General Education Board (a philanthropic arm of Standard Oil).

 - William Hall Smith was hired by Meharg, who picked up the emerging youth programs in the Midwest to work with youth in the south.

 - Meharg was "hired" by Knapp to work for USDA, giving him the opportunity to use the franking privilege to provide educational materials, bulletins, and seed corn to Smith as he worked with young people.

- 1904**
 - J.F. Howe introduced corn-growing contests in Indiana.

 - G.C. Adams introduced corn-growing in Newton County, Georgia, and W. B. Merritt made it a state wide activity.

 - Cap. E. Miller in Keokuk County, Iowa, sponsored a county organization of boys and girls with officers and educational programs.

 - Miller's plans fostered many of the teaching tools of today's 4-H program including life skills and learning-by-doing through projects, group meetings, and exhibits. Community service projects provided active learning interaction between youth and adults and encouraged youth to set and accomplish goals.

 - Otwell's Illinois exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition created a great deal of interest in the idea of working with young people.

- 1905**
 - E.C. Bishop in Nebraska was encouraging work with corn growing, sewing, and baking projects in York County. He organized the work into: Nebraska Boys Agricultural Association (exhibited corn and garden products and held livestock judging contests) and Nebraska Girls Domestic Science Association (exhibited

sewing and cooking and held contests in which they judged "articles of sewing, handwork, and cooking"). The purpose of the Nebraska Associations included a phrase that had come to symbolize the idea of agricultural clubs "...to educate the youth of the county, town, and city to a knowledge of their dependence on nature's resources, and to the value of the fullest development of hand, head, and heart...."

- 1906**

 - Knapp hired Thomas M. Campbell, an assistant of George Washington Carver at Tuskegee, to work with Negro farmers in the south. At the heart of his work was the organization of youth clubs among Negro boys and girls.
- 1907**

 - By this time the principle ingredients of 4-H work had been tested. Graham had shown how well young people would respond to organized clubs that introduced them to agricultural science and technology. Otwell's corn contests, with their premiums and equipment prizes, demonstrated the value of incentives to encourage young people to learn.
- 1908**

 - Oscar B. Martin was appointed by Knapp to coordinate establishing corn clubs using the Mississippi model throughout the south, arranging cooperative agreements, and appointing state leaders. A Country Life Commission chaired by Bailey was convened.
- 1909**

 - The work of Meharg and Smith, and recognition by Knapp, established an outline of a cooperative venture between county officials, the state land-grant college and the federal government at the heart of this cooperative venture were agricultural products for young men and women
 - A report of the Country Life Commission strongly urged Congress to authorize Agricultural Extension Service through the land grant university system. Although Congress ignored the recommendation, the movement started on its own.
 - Professor P.G. Holden, superintendent of Iowa Extension, gave A.U. Storins the job of organizing 4-H in schools.
- 1911**

 - E.C. Bishop from Nebraska, was appointed the first full-time state club leader for Iowa.
- 1905 to 1914**

 - Clubs were started in nearly all states.
- 1914**

 - Passage of the Smith-Lever Act created the Cooperative Extension System. County agents and local leaders began to organize 4-H clubs. Club meetings and projects were made major requirements.

Girl's Programs

While much of the work being done with young people focused on boys and the corn clubs, work with girls focused on home skills like sewing and baking. Knapp was not opposed to girls clubs but was leery of dissipating the limited resources available. He did authorize work modeled after the corn clubs with focus on a single project. In 1909, Martin advocated and

outlined a proposal for establishing tomato canning clubs. In 1910, Marie S. Cromer of Aiken County, SC, organized a club using material supplied by the USDA. At the same time, Ella G. Agnew was establishing girls' canning clubs in Virginia. She was the first woman agent appointed by USDA for farmers' cooperative demonstration work. By 1912, 23,000 canning clubs had been organized.

The establishment of girls' clubs raised philosophical questions about club work conducted up to that time. The principle emphasis in boys' club work until 1910 had been on finding a means of conveying new agricultural techniques from the experiment stations and land-grant colleges to farm operation. The basic program was to improve agricultural techniques and increase production or shift production of other crops. Girls' clubs, confined to canning, sewing, baking, and the like, had no such technological goals. Teaching safe and efficient methods of preserving food was a sufficient goal in itself. However, the canning clubs quickly took on a character different from boys' corn clubs. Girls began as demonstrators of canning techniques, but soon looked at the entire role of women in the home and community. Girls' clubs worked to help women develop self confidence and a sense of community responsibility, an idea later incorporated into all clubs work.

- 1917 • Gertrude Warren was brought to USDA to organize the canning program.

- 1919 • One of the most important meetings in the history of the 4-H movement was held in Kansas City. The general structure of local clubs was firmly established, an expansion of projects was encouraged, relations between club work and vocational education in the schools were defined, and the general principle of local initiative was ratified.

- 1921 • Formation of the National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work for the purpose of obtaining private support for club work. Private support provided trips, awards and events outside the scope of public funding.

Additions to Club Work

From the beginning of 4-H, out-of-state trips have been a great attraction to members. Trips have been used for many years to reward 4-H'ers for their hard work and effort, but they also help participants gain knowledge, information, and ideas, and then bring those attributes back to benefit the home community. In 1911 and 1912, several winners in corn, garden, and canning clubs were awarded trips to Washington, D.C. In 1915, 43 county winners and one state winner in corn clubs each won a trip to the Panama Pacific Exposition at San Francisco. Beef winners in 1916 won trips to the International Livestock Exposition in Chicago. Pig club members were awarded similar trips in 1917. A team of Iowa Canning Club girls won a national canning contest in 1922. For their achievements, they were awarded a trip to France where they gave canning demonstrations.

Exchanges became a part of the educational experience. In 1940 a group of New-York City high school youth visited Iowa for a week. The primary purpose was to give the city youth an insight into farm life and to broaden their outlook on the need for rural-urban relations. In 1948 a group of American young people went to Europe and a group of Europeans came to the United States on the first International Farm Youth Exchange. Out-of-state trips and international exchanges have been highly educational for hundreds of young people in 4-H.

Today

In recent years the 4-H program has been experiencing two significant trends. One involves a more precise recognition that the basic purpose of 4-H centers on personal growth of the member. By using 4-H projects as important vehicles for achievement and growth, 4-Hers are able to build life skills they can use the rest of their lives. Life skills are built into 4-H projects, activities and events that help participants become contributing, productive, self-directed members of a forward-moving society. 4-H educational experiences are built

around life skills that center on positive self esteem, communication and decision making. Citizenship and leadership skills, learning how to learn, and the ability to cope with change also are an important part of 4-H educational programs.

The second trend was toward program and organizational coordination, combining the girls' 4-H organization and the boys' 4-H organization into a single integrated program. The program also incorporates life skills development into an expanding number of delivery modes. In addition to the core 4-H community club model, youth may participate through urban groups, community resource development, special interest groups, EFNEP nutrition programs, school enrichment, camping and interagency learning experiences.

Today, 4-H offers youth opportunities in communications, leadership, career development, livestock, home improvement, and computer technology. Programs are found in rural and urban areas throughout the world. The program is instrumental in building life skills in youth and making our communities better places to live and work. 4-H will continue to grow and develop with the head, heart, hands, and health of youth around the world.

Postscript

One of the astounding achievements in American agriculture, the movement of technological and scientific advances from the laboratory and test plot to practicing farmers and homemakers happened more rapidly than anywhere else in the world. 4-H and the Extension Service were largely responsible for that achievement.

While most institutions in the United States moved toward central management in the 20th century, 4-H remained largely a federally organized group with state and local organizations having as much or more authority than those at the national level. Consensus probably best defines the administrative system of 4-H. With its unique county, state, and federal governance, consensus-building is imperative, if sometimes frustrating. However, the absence of well-defined consensus did not, nor does not, prevent advancement in 4-H.

Individual counties or states can pursue their own programs, influence others to join them and often derive consensus in time. Because of the decentralized nature of 4-H, it is difficult to say accurately that 4-H is pursuing or failing to pursue a particular emphasis. In nearly every case, an example can be found of a county or state deeply involved in a program long before there is any national recognition. Just as frequently, nationally initiated programs often become the possession of local 4-H groups and are administered as best fits local conditions. Even in training programs that appear to have national initiative and leadership, training materials often originate in a state and are adopted nationally. Ultimately 4-H has relied on a remarkable number of people of goodwill throughout its history.

During its first 100 years, 4-H changed from an organization primarily concerned with improving agriculture production and food preservation to one dedicated to the development of young people.