The 4-H mission is to help young people become self-directing, productive, and contributing members of society. The learn-by-doing methods of 4-H result not only in learning practical skills, but also in the development of sound judgment, a sense of responsibility, individual initiative, leadership, and citizenship experience. By becoming involved in a wide variety of real-life activities, ranging from agriculture to expressive arts, boys and girls develop inquiring minds, strengthen decision-making competency, improve communication skills, and learn to work together with both peers and adults.

For over 80 years the 4-H program has provided knowledge to help youth develop the skills needed to improve their lives. Many young people continue to be involved in traditional 4-H projects, such as foods, creative arts, and animal projects. However, conditions of life and the society in which we live have changed over the years. 4-H, too, has changed to meet the needs of youth. The 4-H program now includes school-aged child care programs and programs specifically for high-risk youth.

Revised by Jim Rutledge, state 4-H program leader, Oregon State University. Previously revised by Duane P. Johnson, Extension specialist emeritus, 4-H youth development, Oregon State University. Originally prepared by Mary Alice Dodd, 4-H volunteer leader. Linn County; with the assistance of Lyla Houglum, former Extension specialist, 4-H youth development, Oregon State University; and Michelle Robinson, former Extension agent, 4-H youth development, Yamhill County. Development of this material was funded by R.J.R. Nabisco, Inc., through the National 4-H Council Salute to Excellence program.

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4-H Members and Participants

4-H members are youth in grades 4 through 12 who learn together in club settings led by volunteer 4-H leaders. Club members meet all year long to complete one of 40 or more projects. 4-H clubs usually have officers elected from their membership.

Some youth participate in 4-H school enrichment programs or other short-term special-interest programs. These short-term programs may be led by volunteers or teachers. Most programs focus on science-based curricula that support the latest educational goals for Oregon students.

Youth in grades K-3 may enroll in 4-H Adventures programs and 4-H EFNEP groups.

4-H members and participants are considered part of the off-campus student body of Oregon State University. Current 4-H enrollment includes more than 55,000 Oregon youth.

4-H Volunteer Leaders

Volunteer leaders are the cornerstones of the 4-H program. They may be club leaders, resource people, activity coordinators, or any combination of these. Many counties have an overall advisory committee that involves volunteers and assists the county Extension agent in providing ideas and support for the county's 4-H program.

All counties also have committees in which volunteers participate. These may include project committees, such as a horse leaders committee, home economics leaders committee, or natural resources leaders committee; or program support committees, such as a recognition committee or fair committee. More than 7,000 4-H leaders extend the Oregon State University campus through county Extension offices in all 36 counties.

State

Oregon State University Extension Service

In each state, the Extension Service is part of the land grant university, which in Oregon is Oregon State University. The OSU Extension Service includes six program areas: 4-H youth development, education, agriculture, home economics, forestry, marine science, and energy.

The Oregon 4-H program is directed by the state 4-H Program Leader and a staff of Extension specialists. Most of these people are housed in the 4-H Youth Development Education Office on the OSU campus.

The Oregon 4-H Foundation is a nonprofit organization that administers private and corporate contributions for the ongoing growth and development of the 4-H program in Oregon and for the recognition of excellence in 4-H. The Foundation is led by a board of trustees, an executive director, and a director of development.

County

County Extension Agent 4-H Youth Development

Every county in Oregon has an Oregon State University Extension office and at least one county Extension agent who provides leadership for the 4-H program along with local volunteer 4-H leaders.

The role of the county Extension agent is that of an educator and 4-H program manager. The county agent is a faculty member of Oregon State University and provides a direct community link to the research and information of OSU. Each county provides funding for the Extension office, either by allocation from the county budget or by a special tax service district. Without this support, Extension services, including 4-H, would not be available in the county.

Additional support for the county 4-H program is provided by local businesses, organizations, and individuals.

National

USDA Extension System and National 4-H Council

National leadership for 4-H is located with the Extension Service in the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, DC. There is a national 4-H administrator and several national program leaders who coordinate national initiatives and determine program emphases for 4-H.

The National 4-H Council is a nonprofit organization that administers corporate and private contributions for the growth and development of 4-H. The Council works closely with the 4-H staff at USDA and state 4-H program leaders to carry out a nationwide program. The Council's primary focus is to foster innovation in the field of positive youth development. The Council is directed by a board of trustees representing both corporate and university leaders.
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