

A Brief History of the South Carolina 4-H Program

The 4-H Club program developed from attempts to improve rural education and to teach new agricultural methods in the early 1900's. Boys' Corn Clubs and Girls' Tomato Clubs proved young people were interested and could benefit from instruction and activities in agriculture and home economics. In 1908, A.L. Easterling, Superintendent of Schools in Marlboro County, organized the first South Carolina Boys' Corn Club. Marie Cromer, a teacher in Aiken County, started the first Girls' Tomato Club in the world in 1910.

In 1914, Corn and Tomato Clubs became a part of the youth education program of the new Cooperative Extension Service, operated by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, state land-grant universities, and county governments. By the early 1920s, the youth education program was recognized nationally as 4-H, with the cloverleaf emblem and the slogan "Head, Heart, Hands, and Health."

The Cooperative Extension Service at Clemson University has led South Carolina's 4-H program since 1914. Home Demonstration activities were headquartered at Winthrop College until 1957, and a program for African-American youth was headquartered at South Carolina State College through 1965. The 4-H program for white youth was much more extensive, but most of the types of activities and projects were the same for both races.

"Learning by Doing," through individual projects, demonstrations, and careful record keeping, has been the foundation of 4-H work since its beginning. In the early years, projects focused on improving rural life by changing diet, health, and living conditions. 4-H members competed on the club, county district, state, and national levels for a variety of awards, prizes, and educational opportunities.

Many 4-H activities, such as camping, short courses, fairs and leadership training, began in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s, 4-H'ers participated in World War II home front activities such as selling war bonds and planting "Victory" gardens.

During the 1950s, membership increased rapidly as the baby boom generation reached 4-H age. Due to school consolidations, community clubs replaced many former school-based clubs. More 4-H'ers were from rural non-farm areas and towns. Agriculture, livestock, cooking, and clothing remained popular individual projects, but they were joined by projects such as leadership, public speaking, electricity, and safety. 4-H Clubs also became involved in community service, citizenship, and international awareness activities.

Beginning in the 1960s, declining rural population, a desire to be more inclusive, civil rights legislation, and the changing nature of youth and social issues created a 4-H organization that became a blend of old and new. Traditional projects were updated to appeal to modern teenagers and pre-teens. New projects that addressed current interests such as career preparation, space technology, childcare, computer programming, communication, family relationships, and stress management were added. 4-H activities also broadened to include a variety of lifestyles and children as young as five years old. The Civil Rights Act meant integration of the two separate 4-H programs in South Carolina. By the late 1960's the transition had begun to be well implemented. Countywide programs were reaching out to all audiences, integration was happening at the state 4-H camps, and combined participation was growing in both South Carolina and national events.

By the 1970's 4-H in South Carolina was growing in both member participation and new project efforts. Continuing to expand 4-H's outreach to more than the farm child, new emphasis was placed on encouraging participation of the low income and the handicapped. Joining a national effort South Carolina began to explore how to provide more opportunities to urban youth. Community awareness projects such as citizenship and teen leadership resulted in the initiation of career days, a state teen retreat, a statewide citizenship short course, a project to encourage international friendship with Europe and Russia, and a variety of U.S.A. Bicentennial projects. Traditional projects were also expanded such as the initiation of the Dairy Heifer Project. Concern over falling senior age youth led to the development of new efforts to reach the middle school ages with the development of Junior Achievement days. Adult 4-H volunteerism was also a growing emphasis in the program as efforts began to

increase participation through a greater involvement of volunteers within the program to assist staff with program delivery. South Carolina sent adult delegations to the new annual Southern Region 4-H Leader Forums in Georgia.

The 1980's saw a renewed excitement nationally in 4-H and in the professionalization of youth development in the 4-H program that led to a new commitment of enhancement of the South Carolina 4-H organization. Increased staffing at the state and county levels led to innovative efforts to translate 4-H programming into youth development programming for all youth. In 1983, the Clemson University trustees approved the establishment of 4-H and Youth Development as an academic department in the College of Agricultural Sciences. The involvement of teens in planning new 4-H directions was expanded through the State 4-H Teen Planning Committee with identified task forces to develop new program efforts. Programs such as AMP Camp, Natural Resources Camp, 4-H Teen PANORAMA Camp, and State 4-H Conference were begun or enhanced as well as new projects such as the statewide Fire Safety program, an All Terrain Vehicle Safety program, debating, and performing arts, and a 4-H Ambassadors program. With 4-H Camp participation increasing, new physical and staffing improvements were made at both 4-H Camp Cooper in Santee and 4-H Camp Long in Aiken. In late summer of 1989, Hurricane Hugo devastated much of the 4-H Cooper site but through dedicated work, the camp reopened in time for the next summer camping season. Adult volunteerism was a growing asset of the South Carolina program with the development of a South Carolina 4-H Volunteer Leaders Association and annual state volunteer training emphasizing the empowerment of volunteers in local programming.

The 1990's saw the traditional 4-H program reaching a steadily younger audience as more and more youth development programs emerged in society. 4-H transitioned itself to continue to address the needs of rural youth audiences and to fulfill a new niche that could address the relevant needs of all contemporary youth. Through the 1990's new Extension youth programs such as the South Carolina VISIONS project, CYFAR (Children, Youth and Families at Risk), PEAK (Professional Educator's Access to Knowledge) and the 4-H SEEKERS program were developed through state and federal funding. These innovative programs used traditional 4-H methods but with new emphasis on reaching new audiences and focusing on promoting resiliency and protective factors in youth, families and communities. In addition, these programs explored ways to incorporate more resources of the different colleges of Clemson University in developing new ways to reach the youth of South Carolina.

The specific needs of "youth-at-risk" became a guiding force for development of new 4-H program thrusts through the 1990's. Support for alcohol/drug abuse awareness and education as well as traffic safety and new emerging career fields related to the developing new technology fields led to a variety of new curricula, short-term camps, and expansion of the county 4-H programs to new audiences. New efforts to reach a broader audience of youth with programs that would help them develop the competencies they would need to address the "critical needs" of the 21st Century. From aerospace camps to computer camps to state-wide and county programs such as "The Energy Challenge" and "Highways or Dieways", 4-H programming began to reach all youth from the farm to the largest cities. Youth development needs were no longer tied to just the competencies of "subject/skill areas" but to the development of resiliency skills that help youth cope and contribute to their world of the future.

South Carolina 4-H focused even more on positive youth development prevention methods to address the development of life skills within project work. Youth were challenged to develop life skills in order to become competent, coping, and contributing members of society. Service learning became a new 4-H delivery mode that allowed youth to partner with other youth and adults in order to practice new skills on relevant social issues. "Giving back" to the community from what they learned in 4-H became an expectation by 4-Hers across South Carolina.

In the 21st Century the changing lifestyles of families and the growth of communications broadened the focus of 4-H from more than community 4-H Clubs and camps to more contemporary contact with youth through afterschool programming, internet websites, email and podcasts. The traditional record books have become portfolios and resumes. 4-H curriculum, once specific to each state, has begun to change to nationally developed materials and distributed utilizing newer technologies like websites and CD's. New 4-H curricula are focusing on new technologies like global positioning and robotics while addressing specific audiences like the children of military families. Growing new audiences such as the growing numbers of new first generation audiences arriving in

South Carolina, especially Hispanic families, are beginning to shape new directions of South Carolina 4-H programming.

As part of the 21st Century land-grant university system 4-H continues to expand its efforts to extend its resources throughout the community. “It takes a community to raise a child” is a major belief of the 4-H system and has led to a recognition that South Carolina 4-H does not stand alone in helping youth develop. South Carolina 4-H continues to reach out to other youth development organizations to partner 4-H resources with other agencies in order to create a complimentary system of youth development programming for young people in every county of South Carolina. Combining both 4-H and other program efforts through coordinated afterschool programming, curricula sharing, combined leader and staff training, joint membership and program participation by participants is paving the way to create more opportunities for more youth throughout South Carolina. One example is the work with the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice to create 4-H opportunities for youth who are “at high risk” or already incarcerated. Another effort encouraged afterschool partnerships through the “4-H Eye of the Eagle” project focusing on developing youth teams doing service learning projects for their community as part of their after school activities. As South Carolina 4-H celebrates its first 100 years the evidence is strong. 4-H is unique because it maintains its unique state and local programming nature. South Carolina 4-H is an adult volunteer based program with strong local programming coordinated through Clemson University county 4-H agents and a county advisory board. Together, they develop and provide relevant positive youth development programs for their local youth. This ongoing “grassroots” approach with Land-grant University support is what has and continues to make the South Carolina 4-H Program one of the strongest and most impactful positive youth development programs in the world, today and for the future.