

# Head, Heart, Hands, Health

## Objective

Students will read about the history of 4-H, a youth development organization. Students will develop a timeline from the reading. Students will graph information about 4-H. Students will use online search engines to find information about other youth organizations.

## Background

American agriculture had entered its golden age by the 20th century. In less than 100 years, American farmers had mastered the climate and soil from east to west and created the world's most productive agriculture enterprises. Products were carried by rail, wagon, and ship throughout the world. Specialization in agriculture gave rise to cattle zones, cotton belts, corn belts and milk sheds. Agricultural prices returned to farm labor an equivalent to that of other forms of investment.

But something was missing. By 1870 young people were finding employment in nonfarm jobs, and rural Americans were feeling the loss of their children to the cities. With the course of national development in factories and industrialization, rural Americans saw their numbers declining. Four-H began around the start of the 20th century as a means to keep young people from leaving rural America.

The beginnings of 4-H came about as many rural educators were questioning the relevance of public schools for country youngsters. While education in agriculture was advancing at the university level it was not reaching the public school. The 4-H idea of a practical and "hands-on" learning experience came from the desire to connect public school education with rural life. Early programs combined public and private resources for the purpose of helping rural youth. They also helped promote important agricultural research.

The first meetings were held on Saturday mornings. While parents shopped and visited in town, boys were involved in corn clubs. In corn clubs, boys were asked to test the soil on their farms with litmus paper and select the best seed corn from their family's crops for future planting in test plots. Researchers at land grant colleges and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) recognized that new agricultural discoveries were not readily accepted by adult farmers in the communities. Educators found that youth would "experiment" were more likely to experiment with new ideas and share their experiences and successes with adults. The rural youth programs became a bridge to introduce new agriculture technology to adults.

In 1898 corn clubs were introduced by handing out midwestern seed collections, and youth were offered one dollar premiums for the best yield of corn produced. That year 500 young men requested seed for the contest. By 1904 there were 50,000 entrants.

Club work also included young women. There were sewing and baking exhibits at local and state fairs as well as corn and animal exhibits. Girls were

## Oklahoma Academic Standards

### GRADE 3

Economics—2.1;  
Oklahoma History: 4.1

### GRADE 4

Cultural and Historic  
Features of the US—2.E,5

## Vocabulary

**ambassador**—an official representative of an organization or movement

**aquatic**—connected with, consisting of, or dependent on water

**auspices**—with the help or support of a person or organization

### Cooperative Extension Service

—agricultural education; formal or nonformal system designed to educate youths and adults about such subjects as animal and plant production

**enrichment**—to improve the quality of something, usually by adding something else to it

**kafir**—a type of sorghum harvested for its grain

**land grant colleges**—institutions of higher education established in the United States under the provisions of the Morrill Acts

**milkweed**—a flowering plant that secretes a milky latex and has seed pods that burst open to release silky tufted seeds

**motto**—a short saying that expresses a rule to live by; “To make the best better”

**score**—a group of 20 years

**technology**—the study, development, and application of devices, machines, and techniques for manufacturing and productive processes

also encouraged to be in poultry clubs. Unlike the boys’ clubs, girls’ clubs had no technological goal. In the beginning they were confined to canning, sewing, baking and the like, but in time they became “demonstration” clubs. Girls’ canning clubs were soon introducing new canning techniques and safety procedures. By 1912 there were over 23,000 canning clubs throughout the south.

In the southern US the main objective for 4-H clubs was to break the one-crop cotton economy. Cotton was exhausting the soil, and the boll weevil was destroying crops all across the south. Cotton farmers needed to diversify in order to survive.

The corn clubs provided a solution. Corn could be fed to livestock. Young men under 18 were invited to enter pig-growing contests, using instructions from the land-grant college, with prizes and cash awarded for the most successful effort.

Early clubs were segregated not just by gender but by race as well. As with other institutions in the first decades of the 20th century, programs for blacks and whites were kept rigidly separate. In the 1960s gender or ethnic divisions were erased, and groups were combined into a single integrated program.

In the mid 1950s, 4-H was extended into urban areas and also grew to include an International Farm Youth exchange. Later, the basic 4-H focus shifted to the personal growth of the member. Life skills development was built into projects, activities and events to help youth become contributing, productive, self-directed members of society.

Today there are 4-H clubs around the world, in at least 80 countries with a total membership of over 4 million. There are nearly 50 million Americans from all walks of life who have been 4-H members.

Source: Wessel, Thomas, and Marilyn Wessel, *4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980, A History of 4-H*, National 4-H Council, 1982.

## Social Studies

1. Read and discuss background and vocabulary.
  - The original purpose for 4-H was to get youth to try out the results of agricultural research in hopes they would pass the new methods along to their parents. Ask students if they can think this was a good way to get the word out about agricultural research? Why or why not? Can students think of contemporary examples of young people getting their parents to try new things. (Computer technology would be one example.)
2. Provide copies of the timeline included with this lesson. Discuss the timeline as a class.
  - Students will incorporate the 4-H timeline into historic timelines of their own design, using online search engines or library references. Students may choose any form of timeline to complete this activity. Some themes may include:
    - Agriculture in the 20th century
    - Advances in Agricultural Machinery and Technology
    - Century of Oklahoma History

- Century of American History

3. Students will use online search engines and/or library resources to research the origins of other youth organizations (FF, Girl and Boy Scouts, youth sports, YMCA, etc.)
  - Students will research the reasons for the organization, how and where it began, its growth in the US and world, and other interesting highlights, such as symbols, mottoes, pledges, etc.
  - Students will report on the research orally or in written form.
  - Students will make a class timeline of the origins of all the youth organizations and place their starting places on a map of the US.

### Extra Reading

Artley, Bob, *Once Upon a Farm*, Pelican, 2000.

Lee, John B., *Head, Heart, Hands, Health: A History of 4-H in Ontario*, Ontario 4-H Council, 1995.

## Youth in Oklahoma 4-H

117,310 youth, principally K-12 grade, participated in 4-H in 2014

### HOW MANY YOUTH TAKE PART IN 4-H?

- Organized clubs—28,148
- Special interest programs—29,458
- 4-H overnight/day camps—6,777
- School enrichment programs—52,927

**Total—117,310**

### WHERE DO OKLAHOMA 4-H'ERS LIVE?

- Farms—24.47%
- Rural communities—27.61%
- Towns—14.75%
- Suburban communities—3.13%
- Cities—30.03%

### HOW DIVERSE IS OKLAHOMA 4-H?

- American Indian/Alaskan Native—15.70%
- Asian—1.56%
- Black or African American—11.22%
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander—0.97%
- White—66.21%
- More than one race—0.43%
- Other—3.92%

### HOW DO OKLAHOMANS PARTICIPATE IN 4-H?

- Science and tech programs—96,302
- Citizenship activities—32,099
- Healthy living programs—32,548

### WHO HELPS WITH 4-H ACTIVITIES?

- Adult volunteers—6,278
- Youth volunteers—1,312

**Total volunteers—7,590**

# Timeline of 4-H

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1896	First nature clubs are organized on the east coast.
1898	First Corn Clubs are organized.
1907	First known Corn Club in Oklahoma was organized in Orlando with 50 members.
1907-8	First emblem used with a three-leaf clover. The three leaves stood for “Head, Heart and Hands.”
1911	Fourth “H” added for “Hustle.” Later changed to “Health.”
1912	Girls’ Canning and Tomato Clubs were formed and special interest clubs started for Dairy, Cotton, Kafir, Peanuts, Pigs, Poultry, Horticulture and Better Bread.
1914-18	4-H’ers contributed food and clothing for soldiers around the world and earned the name “soldiers of the soil.”
1916	An “After Dinner Club” organized at Oklahoma State University because the first Collegiat 4-H Club.
1921	The first Oklahoma 4-H Roundup was held at Oklahoma A & M College.
1924	Boys’ and Girls’ Club work became known as 4-H. The 4-H emblem was adopted as a national trademark. The officia 4-H emblem is a green four-leaf clover with a white “H” on each leaf. The Hs stand for “Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.” The 4-H colors are white for purity and green for youth, life and growth.
1927	The 4-H motto, “To make the best better,” was adopted at the first national 4-H camp. The 4-H Pledge, written by Otis Hall of Kansas in 1918, was adopted at the same time. <i>I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service and my health to better living, for my club, my community and my country.</i>
1938	The 4-H Clubs and Student Activities Building, now named Gallagher-Iba Arena, was dedicated on the OSU campus.
1942	The “Feed a Fighter” campaign challenged each member to produce enough food to feed one World War II soldier for a year. Four-H members also collected milkweed pods for use in parachutes and sold liberty bonds to support the war effort.
1950s	Special-interest programs, such as Auto Safety, Flower Gardening, Public Speaking, Community Development and Photography were added to target urban youth.
1960s	Clubs combined into a single integrated program rather than gender or ethnic divisions.
1973	The words “and my world” were added to the end of the 4-H pledge.
1988	Langston University Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program initiated. Goat and Fish Clubs organized in under-served areas. Beginning of aquatic and goat school enrichment programs.
2016	157,269 youth participants in 4-H programs in Oklahoma

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is a program of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.