4-H CLUBS -- AND HOW THEY GREW

One of the unique educational developments of our time is the national 4-H Club program. 4-H offers an unusual training ground for the free enterprise system, for good citizenship, for personal development.

It is warm, human, down to earth in plan; voluntary and democratic in organization. It dignifies the practical arts in daily life. It satisfies a need of youth to "belong."

It holds that scholarship and science can be applied to the farm and to living in rural America, and is developed on the established fact that experience is the best teacher. Attitudes are confirmed by experience.

The time required to develop a new attitude is least from 10 to 12 years and increases with age. Information and skills are learned more quickly and retained longer in the years from 12 to 16 than later in life. In 4-H Clubs members range in age from 10 to 21 years.

More than 2 million rural boys and girls and 200,000 volunteer leaders are concerned with today's national 4-H Club program. Each year 700,000 American youngsters enter their 4-H apprenticeship. More than 20 million have profited by 4-H teaching.

Today in California there are around 31,000 rural boys and girls and 6,500 volunteer leaders active in 4-H Club work. More than 300,000 California boys and girls have had this training.

How did 4-H Club work begin and why? It didn't start at any one place, nor was any single individual responsible.

A key date is 1914 -- passage of the Smith-Lever Act establishing the Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service on a nationwide basis. Since then 4-H Club work has been a vital part of the Extension program. But the movement began long before 1914.

In 1826 a school teacher in Ohio allotted pieces of land to his students and had them grow corn, cucumbers, other vegetables and flowering plants.

In 1856 a young man named Franklin Spaulding in New York won a $50 first prize in the state corn contest. He kept careful records to report to the donor of the prize: Horace Greeley.

A year later a 16-year-old Ohio boy named Wilbert La Tourrette won a premium for growing 95-1/2 bushels of corn on a measured acre.
Numerous examples of such activities may be found throughout the latter part of the 19th century. Statewide contests of various kinds came and then declined. They were held for a year or two, seldom continued. But they marked the educational unrest of the time and pointed to the need for a youth program.

The pattern changed in the first years of the 20th century. Many forces were at work: the recognized need for adequate rural schools; the growing sentiment for practical education; the need of colleges to pass along new information to farm people; the growing desire for the better things of life; the drive to lift rural cultural standards; the concern for the needs of adolescents; the drift of farm youth to cities.

The welfare of rural youth came to be of primary interest to educational and civic leaders.

In 1900, W. P. Otwell, president of the Macoupin County (Illinois) Farmers' Institute, faced the problem of dwindling interest. He distributed selected seed corn to 500 boys with the understanding that each would exhibit a dozen ears at the next institute. This excited interest and encouraged attendance. Otwell broadened this program and in 1904 induced 8,000 boys in Illinois to grow corn in competition for prizes at the St. Louis Exposition. Some 1,250 of their exhibits received awards.

In 1902, A. B. Graham, a county superintendent of schools in Ohio, without knowing of the Illinois undertaking, organized boys' corn clubs. Similar efforts were soon successful in several other states.

In 1909, Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, originator of farmers' cooperative demonstration work in the southern states, went about the systematic organization of a boys' club-work program supplementing adult demonstrations. Dr. Knapp found club demonstrations an effective means of bringing about improved farming practices and beneficial changes in the agriculture of the South. Working with William Hall Smith, superintendent of schools in Holmes County, Mississippi, he established the first boys' corn club to be jointly sponsored by federal, state and local government in the same year.

In 1910, Marie Comer, a rural school teacher in South Carolina, induced 40 girls each to grow one-tenth of an acre of tomatoes. She secured a portable canning outfit which, when the crop ripened, was moved from place to place in the county and used at canning bees where women and farm boys often helped the girls demonstrate improved methods of tomato canning. These demonstrations aroused much interest, attracting large numbers of people.

California 4-H Club work began with gardens in elementary schools. The University published a gardening circular in 1909. In 1912 the State Association of School Superintendents devoted a conference to the possibilities of boys and girls' clubwork in California schools.

B. H. Crocheron came to the University of California in 1913 to become state leader of farm advisors and to organize boys and girls' clubwork in the state.

When the Smith-Lever legislation was enacted in 1914, 40 states had Extension organizations of one kind or another; in every one boys and girls' clubwork was an integral part. In numerous instances the agriculture of an area had been changed as the result of 4-H demonstrations -- improved livestock, crops, soil-protecting practices.
During World War I additional club agents were employed on war emergency funds. Under the direction of the Agricultural Extension Service, these agents made far-reaching contributions toward promoting increased food production, teaching the lessons of food preservation, and encouraging the use of wheat substitutes so important in that period. Working through youth to reach adults is one of the most economical and effective forms of Extension teaching.

Clubwork, beginning largely on the basis of exhibition contests, soon developed production competition and in a short time was the means of teaching rural youth the principles of agriculture and home economics, contributing to the knowledge of the community.

Over the years the Agricultural Extension Service has recognized two major purposes: (1) teaching fundamental principles of agriculture and home arts to rural youth and (2) improving agriculture and rural life in the community through demonstrational means.

In these rapidly changing times we are emphasizing a third major objective: training youth to approach intelligently the problems of agriculture and rural homemaking and to make practical use of sources of current agricultural information and assistance. The successful farmer is the man who keeps fully abreast of progress.

In Extension education we often use the demonstration to show how. Perhaps the best way we could show you how 4-H Clubs work and the results that are obtained would be to let the achievements of a few of our 4-H Club boys and girls tell their own story:

(Eight capsule stories of 4-H achievement follow -- use those of your choice as time permits.)

Robert Charles Fowlks, San Bernardino County (1955 Diamond Star), in his nine years of 4-H completed projects in dairying, beef cattle, gardening, sheep raising, tractor management, farm and home electricity, and junior leadership. He made a profit of $4,869.57 in addition to numerous scholarships and awards, and saved $3,500 toward his college expenses. He says:

"4-H is a way of learning, of formulating opinions by ownership of projects, participating in tours, trips and fairs, entering into discussions and recreation. The development of leadership and citizenship are integral parts of the education that 4-H offers its members. 4-H Club work covers every area of development of the individual -- spiritually, mentally, morally, physically, and socially; it does help to make better citizens and leaders for tomorrow."

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Charles Kenley Mays, Tulare County (1955 Diamond Star), has spent 10 years in 4-H, completing projects in dairying, beef cattle, gardening, sheep raising, tractor management, farm and home electricity, and junior leadership. His project income helped him expand his projects and pay school expenses, buy clothing and other things. He writes:

"I've won many awards in 4-H work, being Silver Star, All-Star, Diamond Star candidate, County, State, and National Dairy winner, County and State Achievement winner, and so forth, but these awards are of secondary importance to me. Carrying out the objectives of the 4-H program has an award in itself -- the development of a young boy or girl into a well-rounded citizen who will be an asset to his community both today and in the world of tomorrow."

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Annie M. Gutierrez, Imperial County (1955 Diamond Star), has spent seven years in 4-H, completing projects in sewing, sheep, beef, electricity, food freezing, tractor maintenance, entomology, and junior leadership. She says:

"I believe that I have achieved far more than dollars of profit, far more than a total of fourteen medals and fifty-five ribbons, of which forty-six are firsts, far more than any tangible object. I have achieved a deep sense of responsibility, a feeling of love and respect toward people, and a benevolent reverence towards God and my country. I have gained everlasting friendships, and I have learned from experience things which no text could ever teach."

Her mother says, "I'm very proud she is mine."

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Nancy Frances Day, Shasta County (1955 Diamond Star), spent eight years in 4-H and is now enrolled at Davis. She completed projects in beef breeding, fat beef, sewing, electricity, cooking, dairying, food preservation, and junior leadership. She made a profit of $1,654.74 from her beef project and received substantial premium money from her clothing exhibits, but says, "Fully as important as the money I have earned is the $326 which I have saved by making my own clothes." She also made valuable savings in connection with her home furnishing and food preservation projects; received a $300 scholarship and many other awards. She says:

"4-H has been an educational and inspirational experience in our home. 4-H has given my sister and me an interest in our parents' business, and our ranch is a family proposition in which we are all working together as a team."
"4-H is more than awards and ribbons -- it is principles and attitudes which are important in the development of young people into good citizens. I learned to be a good loser as well as a good winner; and I also learned not to give up when the going got rough."

Nancy's mother has this to say: "Once a shy, bashful girl, Nancy has become a leader in our community working for the welfare of all young people. She has shown leadership in not only 4-H but in school, church, and community activities."

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Dean Ward Wheeler, Lassen County (1956 Diamond Star candidate), has spent 10 years in 4-H, and is now enrolled at Davis. He completed projects in sheep breeding, fat lambs, beef, gardening, electricity, tractor maintenance, cooking, and junior leadership. He has a handsome array of awards and received a $250 scholarship. He says:

"The money saved from my projects through my years of 4-H project work has been of great help toward my college education.

"Increasing the size and number of my projects is one of the best ways I have learned new skills. For me, junior leader work has been the most worthwhile project. It has taught me leadership and self-confidence."

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Elaine Ann Kirchner, San Luis Obispo County (1956 Diamond Star candidate), has spent nine years in 4-H, completing projects in clothing, beef, food preservation, freezing, food preparation, home furnishing, and junior leadership. She says that all of these projects have fitted perfectly into her home and family situation. Many awards have come her way, including a scholarship. She says:

"My beef projects have brought me the financial profit and the rest of my projects have saved me money. I have an account of my own from which I am withdrawing money for my college education. My 4-H achievements and experiences helped me obtain two excellent jobs.

"Because of participating in 4-H Club work, I have become a better citizen, with an increased enjoyment of my country's freedoms and privileges. By working with other boys and girls, I have found that in combining our ideas we succeed in solving our problems."

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Sandra Darlene Balanesi, Santa Clara County (1956 Diamond Star candidate), has had eight years of 4-H Club work. Her projects have included clothing, livestock, food preservation, electricity, and junior leadership. Among other awards, she has received a scholarship. She says:

"My agricultural and electrical projects have helped me help Dad, and many times I've taken the place of a hired man. My home economics projects have helped me take care of my own clothes, take care of the family if Mom isn't around, how to shop and get the most for my money."

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Hugh R. McBride, Contra Costa County (1956 Diamond Star candidate), has spent nine years in 4-H work, completing projects in swine, sheep, rabbits, steers, chickens, and junior leadership. He has won many awards and received a scholarship toward his college education. Now studying at Davis, he says:

"A profit has been made on most of my projects; it is in a savings account for operating expenses and future needs. Now that I am in college this account helps a great deal in meeting expenses."

"As I look back over the many rich experiences enjoyed in club work I realize that there is an evergrowing ladder of achievement for 4-H members who wish to climb it."

And his mother comments: "Hugh's 4-H work has been a great help in adjusting to being away from the ties of family life, for he has developed self-confidence, and although we are a very close family he is adult enough to continue our way of life without the daily home contact."

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And in our own county, we proudly present the records of:

(Achievements of local boys and girls in 4-H Club work.)

CLOSING COMMENT:

These short stories about 4-H Club boys and girls show what 4-H Club work stands for -- helping young people to help themselves. And that conforms closely to our American ideal: the greatest development of each individual.

To provide the opportunity for the more complete development of the world's greatest human force -- the mind of man -- is the real purpose of 4-H Club work.

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