THE 4-H CLUB MOVEMENT

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The 4-H Club movement is characteristic of the American pattern of living. It developed during the first quarter of this century when a growing population, awakening to the challenge of the industrial revolution, sensed the change from an agrarian to an industrial democracy.

Today is a far cry from 1900 when W. T. Ottwell of the Makeon Illinois County Farmers Institute stimulated the institute to distribute selected seed corn to 500 boys. After exciting interest in the institute, he broadened the program and induced some 8,000 boys in Illinois to grow corn for prizes at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904.

A little more than half a century ago, A. B. Graham, a county superintendent of schools in Ohio, not knowing of the Illinois undertaking, organized Boys' Corn Clubs through the county school system. Fred Rankin, in an address before the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, described the experimental clubs in Illinois as a definite effort in Agricultural Extension.

It is 55 years since Dr. Seaman A. Knapp saw the possibilities of boys' club work in supplementing adult demonstrations. Dr. Knapp found these club demonstrations effective in bringing about better practices in southern agriculture.

In 1910, Marie Comer, a rural school teacher in South Carolina, induced 40 girls to grow 1/10 acre of tomatoes each. When the crop ripened, she conducted canning bees with a portable canning outfit. Women and farm boys often helped the girls to demonstrate better methods of tomato canning.

In 1914, the Cooperative Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics came into being through the Smith-Lever legislation. It brought together many efforts of Extension teaching into one organized program within the land-grant college system and the United States Department of Agriculture. Forty states already had some form of Extension. In every one, boys' and girls' club work was an integral part of Extension.

The 4-H movement came from the farms and rural communities and from the land-grant colleges and rural educators as a response to a new world. The 4-H Club work was a basic part of the effort of early leaders to spread the findings of scientific research to the farms and homes of rural America. 4-H offered a way for rural youth to develop and retain a high type of citizenship during a period of technological change when new challenges were altering American society.

The land-grant college is unique among the world's institutions of higher learning. The land-grant colleges were created through the provisions of the Morrill Act of 1862, in recognition of the need for education to build a progressive and successful agricultural and rural citizenship. It soon became evident that these colleges needed to support their teaching efforts by increasing knowledge and by contributing to the research related to the effective use of resources. In 1887, Congress extended a cooperative relationship to the colleges through the Hatch-Act legislation. Out of this grew the state experiment stations and land-grant college research programs.
Extending new information to the man on the land and assisting in its application was recognized early as an important part of the land-grant college responsibility. This combination of forces and this process have proved effective in the development of the United States as the world's greatest producer of food and fiber. In large measure, economic and social improvement were dependent upon these developments. Industrial and cultural advances in turn, were, dependent upon them. Today, many nations are examining this close relationship of activities, exploring the possibilities of Extension work, and developing programs and methods which involve the principles of the 4-H Club movement.

The 4-H Club program is nationwide. Within each state, it is a basic responsibility of the land-grant college. The Federal Extension Service, as a part of the United States Department of Agriculture, cooperates closely with the land-grant colleges and is responsible for the nationwide aspects of the program. It does not exert a controlling supervision or direction over the policies or programs within the state. Rather, the Federal Extension Service suggests, supports, encourages, and coordinates the efforts of the state in a broad area and provides for a common national endeavor. Each land-grant institution, through cooperation with local people, develops its own policies and programs. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 provided a legal basis and a pattern for this type of national partnership.

The National 4-H Club Congress is a concrete expression of appreciation of off-the-farm leadership in the 4-H Club Program. Professional, industrial, and commercial leaders are well aware of the qualities of able American citizenship. They know the necessity for rural intellectual curiosity. They appreciate the values of initiative and resourcefulness. They recognize the need for a rural leadership with vision and ability to recognize opportunity.

In the 4-H Club movement, they see a means for the maximum development of the individual and of breadth within the group. They aid the land-grant colleges and the 4-H Club workers by providing support through the National 4-H Club Congress, which meets annually and is attended by club members from all parts of the United States. They are generous with their resources. They seek guidance, assistance, and cooperation from the colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture. They sponsor contests designed to stimulate the efforts toward excellence of the 4-H Club members. These contests encourage activities which achieve the larger ends.

The 4-H Club Foundation, financed by private funds, is another national support of 4-H Club work. The foundation has provided a national 4-H Club home just outside the District of Columbia, serving as a national headquarters for the 4-H Clubs of America. This foundation has dedicated itself to education and service and to research which goes far beyond growing corn or canning tomatoes. Its program of research relates to the fundamental needs of youth and synthesizes a reliable body of pertinent information on developmental needs of young people. The 4-H Club Foundation concerns itself with the International Farm Youth Exchange to encourage world understanding. It recognizes the relationship between farm-, home-, and community-related projects and the human aspects of international understanding. The foundation provides scholarships and fellowships for advanced study and training opportunity for club members, volunteer leaders, and professional workers. This work of the foundation in supplementing publicly supported programs is an important development in the club movement.

Farm and home advisors working with agriculture and home economics are supported by great bodies of research information developed by governmental agencies, colleges and institutions, and private funds. Farm and home advisors are trained to interpret this information in terms of local conditions and to assist people in putting it into practical form for application. In addition, the 4-H local volunteer leaders, farm and home advisors and college specialists concerned with club work have a comparable body of adaptable scientific findings to rely upon.
One has only to turn the pages of the agricultural papers and journals to learn of the achievements, the romance, and the wide recognition of 4-H Club work. One has only to look around in his or her own community to see young men and women who are better citizens, who occupy prominent positions within the agrarian complex or outside of it, and who are leaders with a greater promise for the future because of the 4-H Club opportunity.

The well-recognized early purpose of the 4-H Club movement was to prepare boys and girls for farm life, to improve the agriculture and rural life of the nation, and to enable agricultural and farm people to compete with growing industrialization while producing ample food supplies. It was developed at a time when food production was of concern. It recognized that those who produced the food were entitled to individual welfare and satisfying rewards. It was a means of building a rural society comparable to the industrial society. It developed when a large percentage of the farm boys and girls remained on the land, and when industry was challenging agriculture as a way of life.

A more basic and perhaps less-recognized purpose was to encourage and help farm boys and girls develop their talents and capacities to the fullest. It was to prepare them for a full and satisfactory life as contributors to the economic and social development of the nation, either on the farm or in other useful callings.

Farm life has changed with technological development and economic progress. The ideal of individual development has not changed, but has adapted itself to changed conditions. More and more farm boys and girls leave the farm to seek places in professional, industrial, commercial, or service fields in our society. The basic philosophies of the 4-H Club movement, the training in skills, in thinking, and leadership, and the basic purposes of the club movement today, serve a wider segment of the general society than the movement of a half century ago. Projects dealing with practical effort and good living are still fundamental as the 4-H Club movement reaches into rural nonfarm populations, suburban areas, and even into the urban areas.

A half century and more of 4-H Club work has left its mark on the agriculture of America. It has left its mark on the citizenship of America. It is important in a nation seeking to recognize its own problems and to find solutions within the framework of a democratic maturity.

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