



UConn 4-H Fact Sheet

History of Cooperative Extension & 4-H

HISTORY OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

On May 15, 1862 President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act creating the Land-Grant University system with 11 million acres of public land. By this action the seeds of what we now know as the Cooperative Extension System were planted. Public interest, and the creation of “farm institutes” in a number of states, fueled the passage of the Hatch Act of 1887. This created the Agricultural Experiment Stations by appropriating an original \$15,000 for every state. An important part of this mission is to provide research-based information in support of Cooperative Extension programming. The concept of “Extension” was, in fact, being practiced in many states before President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act on May 8, 1914. Through this legislation, Cooperative Extension was legitimized as a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state and local governments. Over the years, congressional acts have amended the original language to reflect the changing needs of society. The Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the federal component that coordinates the national research, education and extension network. 4-H is the youth development component of CES. In Connecticut, the partnership is between the United States Department of Agriculture and the University of Connecticut, with support from county Extension Councils. Funding is by USDA and the State of Connecticut through the University of Connecticut budget, additional grants and local program support.



HIGHLIGHTS OF 4-H HISTORY

The 4-H program took shape over a number of years through the efforts of A.B. Graham, Ohio; Liberty Hyde Bailey, New York; O.J. Kern, Illinois; E.C. Bishop, Nebraska; J.C. Hilter, North Dakota; L.R. Alderman, Oregon; and Oscar H. Benson, Iowa. Nationally, 4-H Clubs were preceded by corn clubs for boys and canning clubs for girls organized early in this century by public school educators.

In Connecticut, A.J. Brundage was sent to the Connecticut Agricultural College at Storrs with these simple instructions, “Go over to Mansfield and start a corn club.” He organized club work in the Mansfield schools in 1913 and in January 1914 became “State Club Organizer.”

IMPORTANT MILESTONES IN 4-H HISTORY

- **1902:** The first Youth Clubs are formed in Clark County, Ohio, which is considered the birthplace of 4-H in the United States. The first club was called “The Tomato Club” or the “Corn Growing Club”. T.A. Erickson of Douglas County, Minnesota, started local agricultural after-school clubs and fairs that same year.
- **1907:** O.H. Benson introduced the first emblem design used for boys’ and girls’ clubs. It was the three-leaf clover. The three H’s stood for Head, Heart and Hands.
- **1908:** O.H. Benson and others began using a four-leaf clover design. Benson said that the H’s should stand for Head, Heart, Hands and Hustle...Head trained to think, plan and reason; Heart trained to be true, kind and sympa-

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thetic; Hands trained to be useful helpful and skillful; and the Hustle to render ready service and to develop health and vitality.

- **1911:** At a meeting in Washington D.C., club leaders adopted the present 4-H design, a green four-leaf clover with an H on each leaf. O.B. Martin, South Carolina suggested that the four H's represent the equal training of head, heart, hands and health.
- **1921:** A National Committee on Boys' and Girls' Club Work was organized to encourage private sector support.
- **1922:** The first National 4-H Congress was held.
- **1924:** Boys' and Girls' Club work became known as 4-H and the 4-H clover emblem was patented.
- **1927:** The first National 4-H Club Camp was held in Washington, D.C., and the 4-H Pledge, written by Otis Hill, State 4-H leader from Kansas, was officially adopted by the 4-H members and leaders attending the first National 4-H Camp (The pledge has been changed only once, in 1973 to include "my world.")
- **1927:** The 4-H motto: "To Make the Best Better" was proposed by Miss Carrie Harrison, a botanist in the Bureau of Plant Industry. It was adopted by the 4-H members and leaders attending the 1927 National 4-H Camp and has remained unchanged.
- **1937:** Congress passed a law to protect the use of the 4-H name and emblem.
- **1948:** The International Farm Youth Exchange began in 1948. (Now known as International 4-H Youth Exchange or IFYE).
- **1948:** The National 4-H Club Foundation was organized
- **1957:** The National 4-H Center opened in Chevy Chase, Maryland.
- **1976:** The National 4-H Council was created by the merger of the National 4-H Foundation and the National 4-H Service Committee.
- **1980's:** The Blue Sky Below My Feet Space Technology Video Program featuring Col. Ellison Onazuka and dedicated to the Challenger Crew was developed.
- **1990's:** 4-H became focused on issue-based programming, such as Youth at Risk and National Initiatives identified by the Cooperative Extension System concerning the following topics: Alternative Agricultural Opportunities; Building Human Capital; Competitiveness and Profitability of American Agriculture; Conservation and Management of Natural Resources; Family and Economic Well Being; Improving Nutrition, Diet and Health; Revitalizing Rural America and Water Quality.

4-H Today

Today, 4-H serves youth in rural, urban, and suburban communities in every state across the nation. 4-H members are tackling the nation's top issues, from global food security, climate change and sustainable energy to childhood obesity and food safety. 4-H out-of-school programming, in-school enrichment programs, clubs and camps also offer a wide variety of STEM opportunities – from agricultural and animal sciences to rocketry, robotics, environmental protection and computer science – to improve the nation's ability to compete in key scientific fields and take on the leading challenges of the 21st century.

ADDITIONAL 4-H HISTORY RESOURCES

UConn Library Digital 4-H Archives

<https://archives.lib.uconn.edu/islandora/search/4-H?>

[type=edismax&cp=islandora%3Aroot](https://archives.lib.uconn.edu/islandora/search/4-H?type=edismax&cp=islandora%3Aroot)

National 4-H History Preservation Program

[https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/](https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Repos_National.asp)

[Repos_National.asp](https://4-hhistorypreservation.com/Repos_National.asp)

Records of the Extension Service

<https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/033.html>

4-H History

<https://4-h.org/about/history/>

A Brief History of 4-H: A Visual Timeline

<https://modernfarmer.com/2017/07/a-brief-history-of-4-h-a-visual-timeline/>

Everything You Need to Know

About the History of the 4-H Club

[https://www.countryliving.com/](https://www.countryliving.com/shopping/antiques/g16758715/4-h-club/)

[shopping/antiques/g16758715/4-h-club/](https://www.countryliving.com/shopping/antiques/g16758715/4-h-club/)

For information on how to support 4-H contact:

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