



# OKEECHOBEE NEWS

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## Old 4-H photos, history sought

Were you in a 4-H Club as child? Was a family member?

The Okeechobee County Extension Office is looking for old photos of 4-H Clubs and activities and for information about the history of 4-H in this county.

Florida will celebrate 100 years of 4-H in 2009. In preparation, county extension offices have been asked to document some of the program's history and distinguished former 4-Hers.

Debbie Clements at the Okeechobee Extension Office is asking community members to help. "We want Okeechobee County to be well represented," she explained. "But we don't have much information on the early years of 4-H." She said they welcome photos and 4-H stories and information from any year, but in particular they are looking for information on any 4-H Clubs that existed before the 1970s.

Information and photos may be emailed to Mrs. Clements at [DSC1954@ufl.edu](mailto:DSC1954@ufl.edu) or brought by the Extension Office in the County Annex on U.S. Highway 98. Mrs. Clements said original photos can be scanned (copied) at the office. Interested persons may also call Mrs. Clements at (863) 763-6469.

The roots of 4-H rest at the beginning of the 20th century, when progressive educators began to emphasize the needs of young people. They introduced nature study as a basis for improving agricultural education.

"Learning by doing" was a key component of the program, which sought to make education relevant and enjoyable for young people without sacrificing substance. To further draw young people into the program, Farmers' Institutes cooperated with school superintendents, sponsoring and promoting production contests, plant identification and soil tests.

The very first 4-H club in the nation traces its roots to 1902, in Springfield Township, Ohio. By March 1904, several boys and girls clubs around the nation had already begun exhibiting projects to "demonstrate" what they had learned. Most states organized clubs outside their schools. Rural parents served as volunteer leaders for the youth clubs, and County Extension agents provided materials for them. Extension agents noted that young people could learn the new scientific agricultural techniques, model them in their demonstrations, and teach them to others. Farmers and rural families saw the practical benefits of 4-H, and support for the organization grew. In 1918, the term "4-H" was first used in a federal bulletin authored by Gertrude L. Warren. By 1924, wider use of the term "4-H" designated these hands-on learning clubs for boys and girls.

## **4-H in Florida**

Florida's children and youth began enjoying educational activities provided in cooperation with the state's land-grant institutions as early as 1909. 4-H type programs were first established in north Florida, including Suwannee, Columbia, Madison and Gadsden counties. The boys participated in corn clubs, and the girls were active in tomato clubs.

Leadership for the Florida 4H program was found in three major academic institutions. State 4-H club agents were housed at the University of Florida and Florida State University (originally, Florida State College for Women). In addition, District Extension agents working with 4H programs for black youth were housed at Florida A&M University. Separate programs were conducted for boys and girls, as well as black and white youth.

As was typical in the rest of the southern region of the United States, 4H clubs met in the schools with agricultural agents teaching agricultural projects to boys. Girls met with home economics agents to learn about projects associated with the home and family.

The school club programs were supplemented with a number of out- of-school events and activities. County and regional fairs in Florida have a long tradition of providing opportunities for 4-Hers to publicly show their projects and compete for awards. Agricultural judging teams, organized in many counties, participated in regional, state and national contests. These teams provided a way for youth to travel and meet people from outside their communities, and learn more about the world around them.

With the leadership of national 4-H specialists at the USDA, and the support of the National 4-H Service Committee and the National 4-H Foundation, Florida 4-Hers participated in a number of national events, including National 4-H Congress, National Conference and Citizenship Short Course. When the National 4-H Center was established in the 1950s, Florida 4-Hers raised about \$50,000 through the sale of chocolate bars which they contributed to the center.

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