

Source: Jeff Young, 4-H Youth Development Agent

Since its inception in 1909, the 4-H program in Kentucky has helped shape the state's youth into productive, contributing members of society. Over the years, the organization has transformed to meet the needs of generations of young people. As the 4-H program in Kentucky celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009, now is a good time to reflect on the organization's past accomplishments and plan for the future.

National 4-H was formed to fill the needs of practical education and advancing agricultural technology in rural areas. In Kentucky, 4-H began with the organization of the Fayette County corn club in 1909. 4-H would have an immediate impact on the state's youth. In just eight years, the organization spread to 42 counties and included 3,887 young people.

The participation in 4-H has increased steadily over the years. Last year, 229,126 Kentucky youths were involved with 4-H. This is nearly 27 percent of all the state's young people.

4-H prides itself on being a very inclusive organization. While 4-H's beginnings are in agriculture, as early as the 1930s the organization offered programs to young people who had no agricultural background or experience. Today, many of 4-H's programs have strong ties to the organization's agricultural beginnings, but there are just as many programs that do not. 4-H offers youth opportunities in communications, leadership, career development, livestock, home improvement, and computer technology.

Despite which program 4-H'ers are involved with, the purpose of 4-H is still to help its members develop personal growth. Life skills are built into most 4-H projects, activities and events. These skills help participants become contributing, productive, self-directed members of a forward-moving society.

In addition to the traditional 4-H community club model, youth may participate through urban groups, community resource development, special interest groups, EFNEP nutrition programs, school enrichment, camping and interagency learning experiences.

Many people do not realize the diversity of programs that 4-H has to offer, and also that it isn't just youth oriented. There are plenty of mentoring opportunities for adults.