

Views from VanDeWalle

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August 9, 2023

4-H School Enrichment & More

With county fair being over and during state fair time, I often am asked, “What are you doing now that fair is over?” The answer to that question is, “A lot!” This week, I’m focusing on the delivery methods of 4-H which involves much more than fair! In fact, in Clay and Fillmore counties, our small staff reaches 1 in 2 age-eligible youth and families in our respective counties. In Nebraska, 4-H reaches 1 in 3 age-eligible youth and families in all 93 counties with the support of over 12,000 volunteers. Nebraska 4-H strives to enable all youth to develop strong personal mindsets and the social skills necessary for successful futures.

The Nebraska 4-H Youth Development Program strives to empower youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults. 4-H reaches youth through club, camp, afterschool, school enrichment, and special interest programs. The traditional 4-H club and camp experience are likely the familiar methods people are most familiar. Working with 4-H club leaders, parents and club members throughout the county fair is a very visible time. Youth can go to our state 4-H camp, area camps or participate in day camps or workshops which many people, again are familiar.

Did you know that extension staff work year-round to deliver programs to youth during the school year? School enrichment programs are learning experiences offered to students during school hours by local 4-H staff. These programs are designed to enhance the subject matter being studied in the classroom, provide hands-on education, introduce a new topic to students, or spark a new interest! The 4-H school enrichment program is a great way to connect and collaborate between your local Extension office and achieve school classroom’s educational goals. Locally, current programs focus on Career Development, STEM, and Agricultural Literacy. As times and needs change, we adapt to meet the needs of our clients and in this case, teachers, and youth.

Locally, some of the school enrichment programs we have done in the past include Farm to the Cart, My Clothing & Weather, Beef Cattle from A to Z, Soil is Not a Dirty Word, Plant Parts we Eat, How Did That Get in my Lunchbox, Pumpkin Life Cycle, Positively Popcorn, Hot House Detective, Bacteriology, Embryology, & GPS/Geocaching. We also have beef related topics that can be used in collaboration with local school Beef Boosters to provide the educational component to students. Most of these programs are at no cost or have a minimal fee. If you are interested, be sure to check out our website at fillmore.unl.edu.

There are some extension offices that provide after-school workshops or educational sessions for youth. Finally, there are special interest types of programs that extension staff provide. Locally, examples of these include the upcoming AgVenture Day which is a collaborative effort among the South-Central Cattle Women and Extension. At this program, area 4th graders learn about agricultural products and how their food is produced. In the spring, Progressive Agriculture Safety Day reaches over 100 youth with presentations to keep participants safe.

To identify the impact that the 4-H Program is making in the lives of youth ages 5-18, various research studies have been conducted across Nebraska and the nation. For example, a nationwide longitudinal study by Tufts University (2013) found that compared to their peers, youth involved in

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4-H programs are nearly 4 times more likely to make contributions to their communities (grades 7-12). Also, 4-H'ers are about 2 times more likely to be civically active (grades 8-12). The same study found that 4-H young people are nearly 2 times more likely to participate in science, engineering, and computer technology programs during out-of-school time (grades 10-12). Finally, 4-Hers are nearly 2 times more likely to make healthier choices (grade 7).

Next time you consider asking an extension staff "What are you doing now that fair is over?", consider instead asking, "What programs or projects have you been working on?" I'm sure you will hear about some of the school enrichment programs, in addition to the countless efforts related to foods, early childhood development, crops, livestock, horticulture, community development and other youth development programs. For more information about Nebraska Extension's educational programs, research, and initiatives, go to extension.unl.edu.