

Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education #3: FFA and 4-H—A Comparison¹

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Introduction

FFA and 4-H were established in the early 1900s to 1920s and have evolved greatly since they were founded. Even though many recognize the organizations, there is still a big disconnect in understanding the similarities and differences between them. This document serves as an educational tool for school-based agricultural education and 4-H programs, and provides a background of the history, characteristics, and membership process of these long-standing organizations.

FFA History

FFA's history began in 1917 and has seen many milestones over the years. Today, the organization continues to flourish with memberships and programs across the U.S. and nearby U.S. territories. Below is a timeline that highlights some of the important events that helped build the foundation of today's National FFA Organization.

1917: The Smith-Hughes Act was passed. It established federal funding to vocational education, including agricultural education (FFA History, n.d.). The passing of this act sparked the idea of having a club for boys who were interested in agriculture and were in agricultural classes.

1928: Future Farmers of America (FFA) was established in Kansas City, Missouri (FFA History, n.d.).

1929: National blue and corn gold were established as the organization's official colors (FFA History, n.d.).

1930: E. M. Tiffany wrote the Official FFA Creed, which was adopted as the official creed (FFA History, n.d.).

1935: New Farmers of America (NFA) was founded in Tuskegee, Alabama. This organization was established for African American male students who were interested in agriculture (FFA History, n.d.).

1965: FFA and NFA merged into one organization (FFA History, n.d.). Before the merging of the two entities, FFA was a predominantly white male organization in the southern states. This merger made a significant impact on increasing diversity.

1969: Women were able to gain full membership in Future Farmers of America. They were also allowed to compete in regional and national competitive events (FFA History, n.d.).

1988: Future Farmers of America changed its name to National FFA Organization (FFA History, n.d.).

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Today, the National FFA Organization can be found in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The number of current members in FFA is 669,989 and the number of Alumni members is 459,514. Collectively, there are 8,630 school chapters across the country and 2,236 Alumni chapters (Our Membership, n.d.).

History of 4-H

The origins of 4-H are not necessarily clear. Agricultural clubs to help teach young children the importance of different farming techniques started in the late 1890s. However, the first official 4-H club was not established until 1902. Some major events in 4-H history are listed below.

1902: The first 4-H club was established by A. B. Graham (an Ohio school superintendent). It was a “boys and girls club” with a project based on corn (National 4-H History, 2020).

1906: Knapp, who worked with the USDA, hired Thomas M. Campbell. Campbell was an assistant of George Washington Carver at Tuskegee, hired to work with African American farmers in the South. His work led to the organization of youth clubs among African American boys and girls (National 4-H History, 2020).

1907: O. H. Benson developed a three-leaf clover with 3 H’s: head, heart, and hands (National 4-H History, 2020).

1909: USDA developed guidelines for establishing girls’ tomato canning clubs (National 4-H History, 2020).

1911: O. H. Benson and Jessie Field Stambaugh are credited with developing a four-leaf clover, with the 4 H’s being head, heart, hands, and hustle. O. B. Martin later suggested changing the fourth H from hustle to health (National 4-H History, 2020).

1914: The Smith-Lever Act was passed and established the Extension Service partnering with land grant universities, which house 4-H for each state (National 4-H History, 2020).

1918: The 4-H Creed was developed in Wyoming and later adopted nationally (National 4-H History, 2020).

1927: The club motto, proposed by Carrie Harrison, “To make the best better,” was adopted.

At the first National 4-H Camp in Washington, D.C., the present 4-H pledge was officially adopted (National 4-H History, 2020).

1973: The 4-H pledge had the words “and my world” added (National 4-H History, 2020).

There are over 7 million 4-H members in over 50 countries (4-H Around the World, 2020). While many of the first clubs focused on agriculture and home economics topics, today’s mission mandates include citizenship, healthy living, and science (4-H National Headquarters Factsheet, 2020).

FFA Characteristics

FFA Mission

“To make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education” (FFA Mission & Motto, 2019).

FFA Motto

“Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve” (FFA Mission & Motto, 2019).

FFA Brotherhood Pledge

“To practice brotherhood, honor agricultural opportunities and responsibilities, and develop those qualities of leadership which an FFA member should possess” (National FFA Official Manual, 2020).

SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience)

SAEs are designed to allow students the opportunity to explore their interests and potential careers (SAE for All, 2020). Students begin with a Foundational SAE, then explore Immersion SAEs:

1. Placement/Internship/Shadowing
2. Ownership/Entrepreneurship
3. Research (experimental, analytical, or invention)
4. School-based Enterprise
5. Service Learning

Career and Leadership Development Events (CDEs and LDEs)

Career and Leadership Development Events help to develop college and career readiness skills that foster critical thinking and decision-making skills (Career and Leadership Development Events, 2020). Some examples of these events include:

1. Agricultural Communications
2. Agricultural Issues
3. Conduct of Chapter Meetings
4. Extemporaneous Public Speaking
5. Food Science
6. Livestock Evaluation
7. Parliamentary Procedure

4-H Characteristics

4-H Mission

“The mission of 4-H is to provide meaningful opportunities for all youth and adults to work together to create sustainable community change. This is accomplished within three primary content areas, or mission areas—civic engagement and leadership, healthy living, and science. These mission areas reiterate the founding purposes of Extension through agriculture (e.g., community leadership, quality of life, and technology transfer) in the context of 21st century challenges and opportunities.”

“To assist youth, and adults working with those youth, to gain additional knowledge, life skills, and attitudes that will further their development as self-directing, contributing, and productive members of society” (National 4-H Strategic Plan, 2017).

4-H Motto

“To Make the Best Better” (National 4-H History Preservation, n.d.).

4-H Pledge

“I pledge ... My Head to clearer thinking, My Heart to greater loyalty, My Hands to larger service and My Health to better living for my club, my community, my country, and my world” (National 4-H History Preservation, n.d.).

4-H Events and Activities

Events at all levels should complement county programs and offer opportunities ranging from educational conferences, workshops, and camps to competitive exhibitions, demonstrations, public speaking, and judging events. 4-H events and activities are a planned part of the 4-H curriculum and are reflective of the membership and their specific 4-H Project. All events and activities should support one of the approved Curriculum/Project categories, including:

1. Science—Animals, Plants, Environmental, & Technology
2. Leadership, Citizenship, & Communications
3. Healthy Living: Family and Consumer Sciences, Food, Personal Well-being, & Safety

4-H events and activities should be designed so that youth can: gain experience and develop skills in gathering, absorbing, preparing, and presenting educational information; enhance decision-making capabilities; make public presentations; learn standards by which comparisons are drawn; and develop good sportsmanship.

Becoming a Member

FFA

FFA is a school-based agricultural club, meaning that students have to be enrolled in an agricultural course at a middle or high school to become a member. Under certain circumstances, a student can join an FFA chapter in a neighboring school district if there is not a chapter in their home district. However, this decision is completely up to the school district and state association. FFA members are in grades 7–12, and college.

4-H

4-H is an extracurricular club. This means that it is often not tied to a course at a school, even though the meetings may be held at a school site. To find the 4-H clubs in an area, contact the local UF/IFAS Extension office. State 4-H Programs are a part of the Land Grant University and the Cooperative Extension System. Local 4-H Extension agents will have a list of the different clubs and their project areas that are in the county. Once a club is found that best suits the youth and member’s needs and interests, they can enroll in 4-H through 4-HOnline, an online enrollment system. After enrollment, a payment is needed for membership dues. The age range to become a 4-H member is 5–7 years old for Cloverbuds and 8–18 years old for 4-H members,

making it a great way for all children in the family to get involved.

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