

History

4-H began in Clark County, Ohio. On January 15, 1902, Mr. Albert Belmont Graham, the superintendent of the Springfield Township Schools at that time, organized a meeting with some thirty boys and girls in the county courthouse basement. The intent behind the meeting was to learn more about harvesting corn, planting a garden, testing soil samples, tying knots in rope and identifying natural wildlife such as weeds and insects. Eventually, the group came to be called the "Boy's and Girl's Agricultural Club" with their research continuing well into 1903. Prizes were given to recognize the efforts of all the members in executing projects based upon the previously mentioned areas.



Given the success of Graham's "out-of-school education program," the Ohio State University created a plan to aid in the club's research through the use of the Agricultural Experiment Station and the College of Agriculture. In time, the Ohio State University's influence helped to establish additional youth agricultural clubs throughout Ohio. By 1905, there were over 2,000 youth within sixteen counties partaking in similar programs to that of the "original" Agricultural Club. Proving extremely successful in his practices, Graham accepted the position as Superintendent of Extension for Ohio. Once in office, Graham set the following concepts, which form the basis for the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service:

- To elevate the standard of living in Ohio
- To emphasize the importance of hard work and habits of industry which are essential to building a strong character.
- To acquaint boys and girls with their environment and to interest them in making their own investigations;
- To give the boys who shall become interested in farm work an elementary knowledge of agriculture and farm practices and to give girls the essential facts of domestic economy;
- To educate adults in the elementary science of agriculture and in the most-up-to-date farm practices;
- To cultivate a taste for the beautiful in nature;
- To inspire young men and women to further their education in the science of agriculture or domestic science.

Becoming an 'ambassador' for agriculture through Extension, Graham sought "to raise the standard of rural life. He stressed the dignity of hard work and sound character, and he taught that agriculture could be improved by applying the ideas of science." In 1916, fourteen years after the first courthouse meeting, the Ohio 4-H organization officially began with the establishment of the Department of Boy's and Girl's Club Work.

With the roots for 4-H deeply rooted within Ohio, the 4-H program has since spread to all fifty U.S. States and internationally to more than eighty countries around the world. However, Ohio is proud of its early 4-H heritage and of the fact that the Ohio programs are one of the largest in existence today. 4-H is no longer only for members of the farming community, but extends into the suburbs and inner cities all over America. Membership is open to all youth between the ages of five and nineteen. Members are welcome, regardless of cultural, economic and social backgrounds. Therefore, even with the many changes in society today, Graham's basic aim for 4-H remains the same: "The development of youth as individuals and as responsible, productive members of the community in which they live."

