

**Wearing the tuxedo he made, Doug Kramer of Tulare County is the first young man to be a State 4-H Dress Revue winner.**

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## The new look of 4-H

Val Little ■ Thayer Horn

**T**raditions and emphases in California's 4-H Youth Program have changed dramatically in the last few years. Where once virtually all members were from rural areas, the majority of the over 140,000 youngsters now enrolled in 4-H are from suburban and urban areas. Leading projects have always been clothing and livestock, but the range of projects and activities has broadened to include everything from automotive repair to wildlife conservation. Competition to raise the highest quality pig or the most succulent ear of corn is still part of the program, but self-determined projects are increasingly in demand.

Until fairly recently, 4-H meant organized clubs. Today, over half the youth in 4-H participate without regular club meetings. They take part in a wide variety of special-interest group activities, field days, workshops, or camps.

In spite of these changes, the basic premise—to develop each child's potential through the teaching technique of "learn-by-doing"—remains the same.

California's 4-H Youth Program was conceived in August 1912, when 26 members of the State Association of City and County Superintendents gathered at Santa Catalina Island. They agreed that "by cooperation between state and county fair officials and the University, ... an excellent system of clubs can be devised and put into operation." Within

two years, 30 counties were participating, with over 1,200 members. Today, 57 counties participate, with a membership totaling over 140,000.

These early agriculture or 4-H clubs were built on some fundamental assumptions: (1) that the agricultural institutions of the state and nation had information which, applied to farming, would increase farm profits; (2) that many boys and girls wanted to make money by farming and wanted to be shown how; and (3) that the chances for

individual success are increased through competition.

None of these basic assumptions are mentioned anywhere in today's 4-H material. This indicates how substantially the goals and objectives of the 4-H program have changed since that time. Emphasis is no longer on subject matter, but on the development of young people *through* subject matter. "Our sights are on the individual and his or her personal growth," says Fisk Phelps, Assistant Director—Youth. "Agriculture—or for



**A field day in water safety is a good example of the 4-H learn-by-doing method.**



## TOP 4-H PROJECTS

Project	Rank	1976		Rank	1956	
		Number enrolled	Percent		Number enrolled	Percent
Food preparation	1	13,656	9.7	2	7,626	25.0
Clothing	2	12,481	8.9	1	12,777	42.0
Horses and ponies	3	10,430	7.4	(new in 1959)		
Sheep	4	10,366	7.4	6	2,643	8.7
Leathercraft	5	8,109	5.8	(new in 1972)		
Citizenship	6	7,395	5.3	(new in 1970)		
Junior leadership	7	7,310	5.2	8	1,969	6.5
Creative crafts	8	6,044	4.3	(new in 1975)		
Indoor and mini-gardens	9	5,651	4.0	(new in 1972)		
Rabbits	10	5,551	4.0	9	1,603	5.3

that matter, any subject whatsoever—is just a tool.”

Goals of today's 4-H program are to help youth develop initiative and responsibility, become better leaders, learn to live and work cooperatively together, and explore careers.

The evolution of the 4-H program has come about for several reasons. Dissemination of knowledge through educational institutions, increasingly sophisticated Extension facilities, and the news media have made the California farmer one of the most knowledgeable agriculturists in the world. The need to use the 4-H program to funnel knowledge to the farmer no longer exists to any great extent. Nor is it necessary today to

provide special experiences to the rural youth.

The tremendous increase in 4-H members from urban areas is testimony to the efforts of administration, staff, and volunteers to make 4-H available to everyone. Just eight years ago, in 1967, about 21,500 members came from farm and rural areas and about 13,500 from cities. Today the spread is much different. Approximately 68,000 members live in farm and rural areas and 74,000 in cities.

Since 4-H'ers can, and do, take up almost any project that interests them—saddlemaking, mountain climbing, cross-country skiing, rocketry—one might suppose the tremendous influx of urban youth would bring a new lineup of popular projects, but such is not the case. Animal science, plant science, clothing, and food projects have always been and still are the biggest, but the fastest growing projects include leathercraft, woodworking, and photography.

For city children who want to raise barnyard animals, San Mateo County has developed a mini-farm program. Ten small farms are located strategically within county lines so that 4-H city members can feed and care for their livestock with a minimum of effort, almost as if they lived in the country.



Today, new techniques in delivery enable 4-H to reach thousands of children who might not otherwise be contacted. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) has reached thousands of children (41,000 in 1976) since its inception in 1969. This program, primarily funded by the federal government, teaches the principles of nutrition to children from low-income homes. Innovative forms of delivery, such as the video tape show “Mulligan Stew,” pleasantly provide nutrition information to multitudes of youngsters. 4-H program materials like this are in great demand in public schools and other youth agencies.

Community gardens in minority areas involve members of the community as well as 4-H youngsters. These neighborhood gardens in San Diego, Contra Costa, Riverside, Solano, San Joaquin, and Sacramento counties not only provide food, but also give people of all ages a chance to work together.

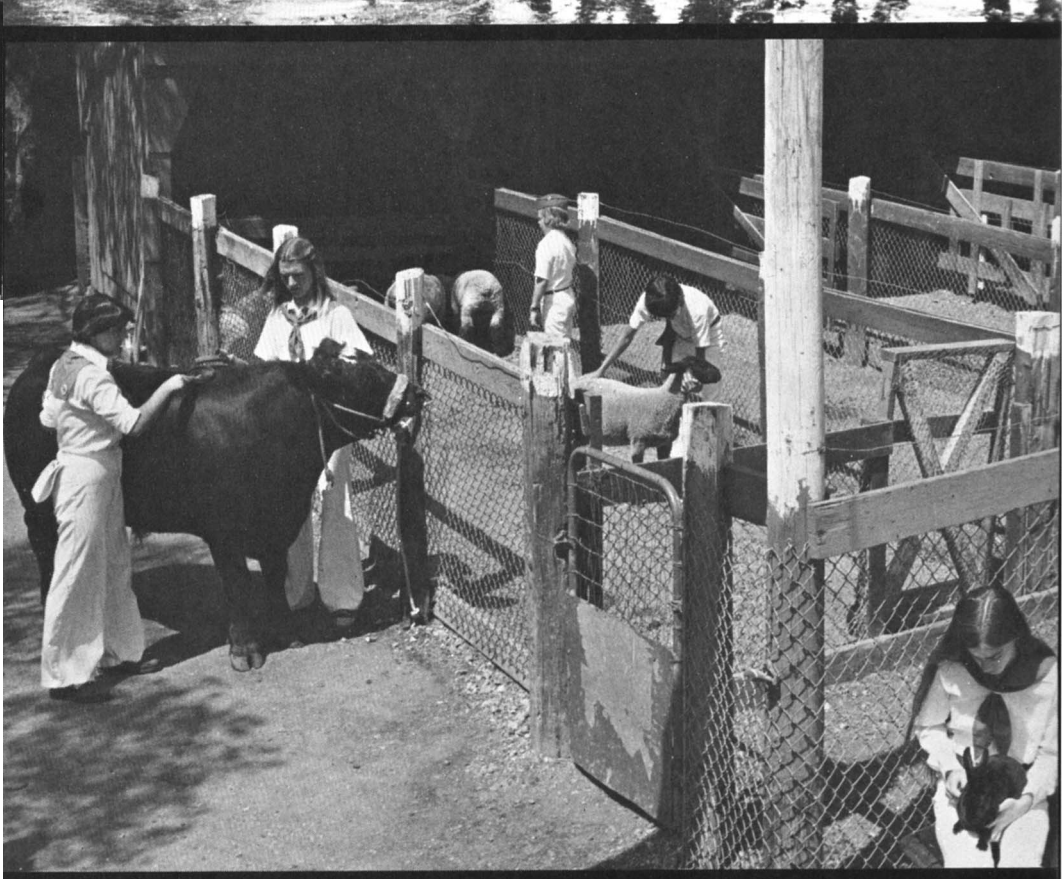
Although such programs reach thousands of children, other little-known programs, developed in cooperation with other youth-serving agencies, reach smaller groups of youth badly in need of help. In many counties, youth who are referred to the program by the probation department work as volunteers with



Working with U.C. Extension Forestry Specialist Jim Laacke, 4-H members learn lumbering practices and will help cut trails and prepare sites for group camping.



Left: At a Guide Dogs for the Blind ceremony, Karen Wheeler, Siskiyou County, and Phillip Saaranzin, Merced County, present the guide dogs they raised. Above: Marine Science project members from Sacramento County enroute to clam beds at Tomales Bay. Right: Urban youngsters show off their livestock housed at one of the San Mateo County 4-H farms developed by youth advisors and volunteer leaders. Lower right: Livestock judge John Alkire coaches showmanship competitors at the Eureka district fair.



youth in areas where there is a high crime rate. Other groups divert gang energies to positive community contributions. Today's 4-H also has a program to teach teenagers the responsibilities of parenthood and a program to help youth prepare for employment.

Other little-publicized 4-H programs are doing a significant job in reaching handicapped youngsters in special schools and institutions. A program at the Sonoma State Hospital, for instance, coordinates on-going 4-H projects with the deaf and blind children there. In San Diego County, 4-H is capitalizing on the universal appeal of animals. Members transport and use their animals as the catalyst for communication with handicapped youngsters.

The trend toward a new look in 4-H continues. "We expect to have 150,000 members by the end of 1976-77," says Phelps. "By 1980-81, we hope to reach 10 percent of the youth in California (about 400,000). However, only about 25 percent of these youngsters will be engaged in club project groups."

The typical 4-H youngster of today is no longer the apple-cheeked country boy or girl who raises a sow or hen, but a city-bred youth engaged in a community pride, horse, or ecology project.

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