

An Investment Report: Allegiance of Former Participants

4-H has 40 million living alumni. This is an overwhelming figure, but yet remains basically meaningless...valueless...without some further explanation or documentation. Who are these alumni? What do they think about their 4-H experience? Was it of any sustaining value to them?

Historically, Extension has focused on program development and implementation. The assumption has been that if programs are carried out and people are reached then the program is effective. However, today such assumptions are unacceptable. Just because a large number of people are exposed to a program does not necessarily mean that it has an impact on their lives. A desire to identify Extension's contribution to the public good, coupled with the current period of budget tightening, has led to a greater emphasis on Extension evaluation.

Continuous evaluation is taking place relating to the ongoing 4-H program and with current members. But for the long run, what better way to evaluate the program than ask those who have participated in it and gone on in their life pursuits to reflect on the impact 4-H may have had on their lives later on.

Several projects have been underway this past winter and spring relating to areas of alumni identification and alumni data collection.

A direct mail appeal over Roy Rogers' signature mailed in eight states, in addition to asking for a contribution, provided an opportunity for respondents to identify themselves as former participants in the program. Some 800 alumni were identified through this procedure.

A 4-H alumni identification questionnaire was inserted into a 100,000 segment of monthly customer credit card mailings of the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company last October. This was a pilot project and over 600 customers returned the cards identifying themselves as past 4-H'ers. An even larger pilot project, using the same general idea and response card message is planned in cooperation with the Amoco Oil Company in their monthly credit card mailings this August.

Another project planned in cooperation with a donor company is to insert a specially designed alumni query response card into a house organ going to Kraft employees in efforts to determine how many of their employees are former members, volunteer leaders or have children involved in 4-H.

Yet another ongoing project currently being conducted in the Communications Division is a VIP alumni search. This consists of a letter-writing campaign to prominent individuals and "high achievers" to determine if they were a 4-H member, or have had any other connection with the program as a 4-H parent or volunteer leader. The letters and response cards are initially being sent to some 10,000 prominent individuals including U.S. Congressmen and Senators, key federal government officials, top military officials, federal judges, university presidents, mayors of major cities, state governors, top corporate officials, executive directors or elected officials of associations, key editors, radio/TV personalities and syndicated columnists, major representatives from the arts, and top stars in the

various fields of sports. Thus far the results of this project have also been excellent.

The second area of projects currently underway within Council relate to alumni data collection. Several projects have already been completed by staff in the Programs Division dealing with surveying past state and national awards program winners. For years The Carnation Company maintained contact with their state and national dairy foods winners through an annual survey and newsletter. Eastman Kodak Company has also done a good job of continuing contact with their former photography winners.

The first Council-conducted impact survey of award winners was done in 1982 for the Amoco Foundation. National 4-H Congress Petroleum Power delegates from 1977, 1974, 1969 and 1959 were surveyed.

In the summer of 1984, 200 national public speaking winners -- from 1952 through 1983 -- were asked to respond to how participation in the 4-H public speaking program, sponsored by Union Oil Company of California, has affected career decisions and other aspects of their lives. A similar survey was sent last fall to the 32 national 4-H veterinary medicine scholarship winners sponsored by Champion Valley Farms, a subsidiary of Campbell Soup Company. Recipients between the years 1970 and 1982 were queried.

Then, to assist with obtaining career information for the preparation of an upcoming food and nutrition advanced manual sponsored by General Foods Fund, a decision was made to survey state and national winners in 9 program areas -- achievement, agriculture, bread, dairy foods, food-nutrition, food preservation, gardening/horticulture, health and leadership. It was decided to survey those who have had an opportunity to have their schooling completed and already launched into a career area. Thus, the survey went only to those who were winners between 1965 and 1975. The survey instrument was long. It was mostly narrative. Like the preceding surveys for petroleum power, public speaking and veterinary scholarships, the only available addresses we had access to were from when these people were winners, thus all addresses were 10-20 years old! Some 4,300 surveys were mailed out in this latest effort. But also, like the earlier three surveys, the results were astounding. Over 2,000 responded...50 percent! This is overwhelming in itself...a 50 percent return using addresses 10 to 20 years old...and a long narrative reponse survey...practically unbelievable...but the results are equally fascinating...and I will get into these in a moment.

First, I need to briefly mention two other data collection and storage projects essential to our anticipated success with alumni. A computerized input and retrieval system has been established in the Campaign Office. For purposes of mailing lists, personal demographical information and for fund raising purposes, this system will serve us well Council-wide. In addition, biographical files on key alumni are being compiled in the Communications Division and will be stored in Council's Resource Center. These files will include biographical information, photos, speeches, news clippings and other hard copy records on select alumni.

We developed a plan for using 4-H alumni prior to planning the search projects. Our anticipated use of alumni basically falls into six categories:

- visibility--success stories, feature articles, television and radio public service announcements.
- programming support--assist with personal expertise in developing project curriculum, educational aids, staff development and leader training, judging; speakers and entertainers at 4-H events.
- financial--personal contributions to 4-H.
- fund raising--testimonials; assistance with direct solicitation of private sector donors.
- key volunteer leader recruitment--identifying and recruiting 4-H volunteer leadership at the national, state and local levels.
- legislative assistance--national, state and local levels (public funding).

There has been a National 4-H Alumni Recognition Program in existence for 30 years, its primary purpose has been to honor former 4-H members whose accomplishments exemplify effective leadership, community and public service and success in their chosen careers. And during this 30 years 240 former participants -- eight per year -- have received national recognition in the program. These individuals were selected from among 3,123 4-H alumni who were honored with state recognition during this period. At the county level, nearly 64,000 individuals have been awarded special alumni medals. Some of these 240 national winners are certainly recognizable names -- 4-H alumni like Secretary of Agriculture John Block; Kentucky governor Martha Layne Collins; Kansas governor John Carlin; United States Senators Thad Cochran, Dale Bumpers, Howard Baker, Albert Gore, Jr.; Orville Redenbacher; Roy Rogers; Johnny Bench; and more than a score of presidents of large universities. But until now, with the conduct of these data collection surveys, little information has been known about former participants of 4-H by groupings, and the sustaining value 4-H may have contributed to their lives and/or careers.

We are finding that these impact surveys being done with state and national winners are indeed giving us the necessary information and documentation to show the true and lasting values of the 4-H program.

Of the 113 responses to the public speaking survey -- 45 percent return -- a significant number were obviously using the skills they acquired in the public speaking program in both their professional and personal lives. And, a number of them praised Union Oil Company for giving them this unique opportunity. Being a skills oriented project rather than specific subject matter, the winners represented a diverse range of professions: an AT&T account executive, interior designer, artist, actor, playwright, TV anchor/producer, a veterinarian, editor, speech pathologist, a banker and a congressman.

A Maryland winner who presently is employed by Bendix Field Engineering Corporation states, "I firmly believe being in public speaking for nine years with 4-H has fostered the confidence and solid morals I need to have a fulfilling career. Please send my thanks to Union Oil for the sponsorship of such a worthwhile program." "As the housing writer for a national magazine, Changing Times, I am in the public eye quite often and public speaking skills are quite important. My exposure to public speaking as a teenager helped me to develop the poise and assertiveness to raise questions at press conferences, and the articulateness and ability to think and speak

on one's feet necessary for conducting productive one-on-one interviews," a Maryland responder writes.

The veterinary medicine scholarship survey showed a high percentage of respondents are now practicing veterinarians. Over half indicated that they are or have been 4-H volunteer leaders. "I don't believe I can stress enough that 4-H was highly responsible for me to be able to get into Vet school and for a successful career," wrote a Washington responder. A New York scholarship recipient says, "I learned more practical things in 4-H than I ever did in school."

In the survey of petroleum power winners, 80 percent of the respondents are in careers dealing with farming, engineering or business/industry. A Louisiana winner states, "It was through Petroleum Power and Amoco that I realized how important the petroleum industry has been (and still is) in keeping our country as a world power. This is why I decided to make the petroleum industry my career, so I can do my part during the difficult time of dwindling resources. I would like to thank 4-H and Amoco for sharing with me what they have to offer, because my life would not have been as good without them." A Virginia responder writes, "Attending National 4-H Congress was one of the highlights of my life. The experience itself was worth a lot, but more important, it helped instill a confidence within me that by a little extra effort, interest, and work, I could achieve more than the average person. Since I had never thought of myself as a high achiever, this was one of the most important things I got from 4-H. I feel that the Petroleum Power Program is particularly important in that it allows young people who may not be good at giving demonstrations and speaking before an audience, (which I wasn't), a chance to participate in competition and excel." The responder is now president of an auto dealership and mayor of the city in which he lives. A Colorado winner from 1964 says, "I feel too much of our American society today looks to the government to solve its problems. I believe the 4-H program fosters that attitude, one of independence, creativity, industry and thrift." A 1959 Texas petroleum power winner says, "As I have gotten older and more mature, the motto continues to have greater significance in that head, heart, hands, and health are all delicately interrelated with one not being able to function 100 percent without the other."

The results of the recently completed narrative survey of 1965 through 1975 awards winners in nine program areas are truly astounding...literally all 2,000 responses.

Statistical data on the respondents by program areas are included in your notebooks. Some general observations can be made that seem to show up program after program:

- a high degree of the respondents have at least 4 years of college-- 75 to 85 percent
- 50 percent of the respondents are currently 4-H volunteer leaders...still showing a high degree of commitment to the program
- a large portion of the winner are married...with a very low divorce rate...often less than 5 percent of the respondents for a program area...perhaps showing some strengths in family values
- a high correlation between subject matter programs the respondents won their awards in, and the career in which they are now occupied.

But even more interesting are some of their narrative responses...the genuine values they place today on the 4-H experiences they had 10 to 20 years ago.

A research scientist in processed meats for Armour Food Company says "my career choice was a natural outgrowth of my 4-H experience. My desire to learn more about food, particularly meat, led to my specific choice of a career in the meat industry."

A vice president for Miller's Super Markets in Ohio -- an agricultural winner -- says "many of my agriculture projects enabled me to have a keen interest and awareness of what takes place in the food chain from beginning to end."

A 1972 Massachusetts winner...now a dietitian in hospital food management...states "4-H taught me that when I get involved in an activity to pursue it with dedication and enthusiasm. Some of my strongest assets today are being well organized, always having goals and attention to detail--all of which I attribute directly to my participation in 4-H."

"While in 4-H, I developed a project on the use of soybeans as a food product. I am now working with one of those products...isolated soy protein...and 4-H provided the 'launching pad'," states a former food preservation winner...now a food chemist with the Ralston Purina Company in St. Louis.

A 1972 dairy foods winner writes "my interest in foods led me to a degree in biochemical nutrition." She is now chief of a laboratory in Toulouse, France, in charge of developing a system to grow genetically engineered cells to produce human growth hormones.

A Wisconsin agricultural winner says "feed rations on my farm are constantly changing. Most changes, however, usually refer back to basic information from 4-H. Record keeping which was required in every 4-H project prepared me for record keeping today." Record keeping was mentioned over and over.

"I realize that many of the qualities I need to succeed I learned in 4-H -- the ability to set objectives, to set reasonable goals, to be organized, to keep records, to speak in public and to deal with a variety of people" -- a 1968 breads winner and currently a junior high school English teacher.

Another winner, leadership 1967, now a health scientist administrator for the National Cancer Institute, credits record keeping as the best and most helpful skill learned in 4-H. "The ability to document progress, set goals, and come to conclusions are skills required in research...skills that were taught in 4-H." Other respondents credited other areas of 4-H training.

A beef nutritionist with Cargill feels that 4-H is the major factor in his personal development and the development of his self image and value system.

A 1975 achievement winner, now a division engineer with du Pont in Wilmington, Delaware, says "4-H was a useful tool in growing up to become a warmer, more caring person. It was always a family affair with us."

And an orthopaedic surgeon at Harvard Medical School in Boston writes that the sewing skills she learned in 4-H serve her well as a surgeon...that there are many similarities between sewing and surgery.

Some respondents were philosophical. The manager for agricultural development, Latin America, for Stauffer Chemical Company, a 1966 achievement winner, writes "the 4-H club provided an arena to learn about life, its challenges, and success at an early age. It helped teach me to be competitive, yet be sensitive and to appreciate that anything can be accomplished if you approach it correctly and work hard enough."

A two-time winner -- veterinary science in 1968 and leadership in 1971 -- a senior research associate from the University of Texas Medical School in Houston writes "On the most basic level, 4-H made it financially possible for me to attend college through money made in 4-H beef and dog projects and scholarships. But beyond that, it allowed opportunities not usually permitted to a child of low middle class families -- public speaking, leadership training, record keeping -- all have been invaluable in my development." The doctor is now a member of the "test tube baby" team and researching the cellular and biochemical aspects of fertilization.

A 1967 California dairy foods winner writes with pride from Paraguay that as a translator she helped the 4-C program (Paraguay's counterpart to 4-H) obtain two Kellogg Foundation grants for health and nutrition in amounts totalling \$350,000.

Some respondents considered themselves the "little people" being heard from, but they also had a message to give. A 1970 food-nutrition winner writes from New York, "I am a waitress in a restaurant. Being a waitress it is important to look neat and to have your uniforms fit properly. With my ability to sew learned through 4-H, I am a success at what I do and help the other waitresses with their appearance, as well."

The 1970 winner in the bread program from Florida is employed as a wrapper in a wholesale sandwich shop. She states, "I realize I learned so many basics in my bread and nutrition projects that I use in my present job--such as how long to leave food out before it spoils, and to properly handle food for the well being of others. I'm also employed as a school bus driver and my safety projects have been a life line for me. Everything I learned in 4-H has helped in later life."

A 1974 national agricultural winner, now farming 18 quarters of land in Kansas...and raising 2,000 head of cattle...credits 4-H with giving him more self confidence for attacking and developing a diversified operation geared to taking on the 1980's demands for survival.

Another 1974 agricultural winner...same year, same program...has gone a different direction. Now a mechanical design engineer for the space shuttle, working for Rockwell International, he writes "many times in 4-H projects I saw that not much was going to get done unless someone jumped in, grabbed the oars, and began rowing." He credits 4-H with helping to visualize leadership roles and to better deal with social situations.

A North Dakota rancher, an agricultural winner in 1969, writes "I am currently on the county extension advisory board. I enjoy staying in touch with the current workings of our local extension service."

Donors were remembered too. A Montana national winner in Foods & Nutrition says "General Foods got me to where I am! Their scholarship helped me go to the school of my choice and to keep on achieving. Today, as Chief of the United States Air Force's Cost Comparison Program at Randolph Air Force Base she is responsible for implementing the OMB A-76 Program which seeks to make our government more efficient by contracting out services to business with cost savings in the millions.

A 1969 national achievement winner, now a foreman for Continental Coal Corporation in Buckhannon, West Virginia, says "the most important thing was my scholarship from Ford...if I had not won the scholarship I could not have gone to college and it would be unlikely I would be holding my present position today."

A medical doctor from Dallas writes that his interest in 4-H photography led him into his career of specializing in laser microsurgery of the eye. He also attached his rather lengthy 8-page curriculum vitae including degrees from Stanford, Phi Beta Kappa, etc., etc. but prominent on the first page is the mention of being the North Dakota 4-H photography winner and winning an Eastman Kodak Company scholarship 18 years earlier!

A 1966 winner, now a financial services administrator for a large bank, says 19 years later "4-H has been the biggest asset to my development outside of my educational training in college. Your investment in my childhood is still paying dividends."

As we continue giving emphasis to this area of identifying former participants and determining ways to make the most efficient use of their expertise and allegiance there are additional components with which we need to deal:

- secure a new national donor for alumni recognition program
- strengthen liaison between Council, the 4-H unit in Extension Service, USDA and state 4-H offices regarding cooperative projects in alumni identification and data collection and exchange of information
- determine the proper vehicle for an ongoing, periodic 4-H communique directed to alumni to keep them informed and to keep the channels open.

I believe that it is obvious that for many who have participated in the program, 4-H Lasts a Lifetime. And, for some of those who did not have the opportunity to participate, the commitment is equally strong.

A letter received last month states: "Although I was not a member of 4-H, I wanted to write to you and express my support for the goals and missions of your fine organization...I am impressed with the leadership education that you offer to our young people. I know that, had I belonged to 4-H, I would have benefited from and enjoyed the camaraderie and the valuable training! With warmest regards, Yours sincerely, Richard W. Riley, Governor, State of South Carolina."