PERCEPTIONS OF UNION COUNTY 4-H MEMBERS

ABOUT THE 4-H PROGRAM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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1997

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Agricultural Education
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1997
The purpose of this study was to determine of perceptions of Union County community club members about the 4-H program, focusing specifically on information which could be used for program development. The primary objectives of the study were to determine 4-H members' perceptions about the 4-H program, to determine whether their perception differed based on age, and to test this process of gathering youth input for possible use in other locations. Eleven focus group interviews involving 77 randomly selected 4-H members were conducted to gather perceptions.

The major findings of the study included the following: the aspects which participants liked best about 4-H were also the same things which participants saw as being the benefits of 4-H participation. These included learning and doing new things, meeting new people, working with animals, and having fun. Overall, participants were not able to identify changes they would make in the 4-H program. This study showed clearly that a 4-H member's experiences were primarily defined by their individual club experiences. Few county level 4-H activities were discussed by participants, with the exception of 4-H camp.
Key findings included: participants strongly preferred a recognition item of keepsake or lasting value versus a cash award, monetary awards were not seen as an incentive to participate in an activity, and the 14-18 age groups expressed some frustration that 4-H seemed focused toward younger members.

Major conclusions based upon these findings were as follows: activities which were favored by members, and seen as most beneficial, did so because they meet their criteria of potential for learning or doing new things, meeting people, working with animals and having fun. Determining program changes desired by members needs to be explored by a method other than group interviews. The Union County 4-H program did not have a recognition system which was meaningful to members, and there was a need for emphasis on the role of teen age members of 4-H. This study supported the conceptual model of Union County 4-H Program Development developed for this study by demonstrating that youth eagerly provided input for program development when such an opportunity was provided.
To Rob and Isaac
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Reported as the single largest nonformal education agency in the world (Price, 1990) and widely known in local communities as "County Extension," the Cooperative Extension System has developed communities of learners through educational programs since 1914. Serving the local community has been the focus of Extension Service programs since its establishment by congressional mandate. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 provided for a national education system linking the resources of land grant universities with the needs and aspirations of people throughout local communities (Price, 1990). The land grant system was created to provide all people with opportunities and access to research and new knowledge that could be applied to meet societal needs, solve problems, and enrich the lives of people (Miller & Snider, 1994).

The original legislative mandate for useful and practical education virtually assured an Extension system uniquely concerned with the everyday learning needs of people, as well as in the family, leisure, social, occupational and professional aspects of their lives. The Extension Service historically has been highly integrated with the lives of individuals and their communities, characterized by county-based programs concerned with enhancing the quality of life (Price, 1990).
The concept of learning to learn has been at the heart of the Extension Service's educational philosophy; a philosophy which stressed teaching people how to think rather than what to think, and viewed education as basic in stimulating individual initiative, self determination, and leadership (Prawl, Medlin, & Gross, 1984).

Program development in the Extension Service has evolved through various stages in its history. Early Extension work was characterized by educational initiatives predetermined at federal and state levels. County Extension professionals recognized, however, the limitation of externally driven planning. Extension professionals found that successful Extension programs were developed with people rather than for people, and a highly participatory grass-roots approach to Extension Service program development emerged. Program development was further modified with the trend-based programming phase, in which program decisions were based on extensive fact gathering and the analysis of socioeconomic trends. This approach continued to involve learners in educational planning, but special interest and commodity groups came to constitute the participatory dimension (Dalgaard, Brazzel, Liles, Sanderson, & Taylor-Powell, 1988).

Today, program development in the Extension Service has incorporated major components from each of these three approaches. Although no single program model has been applied by Extension Services nationally, the process typically involves certain major components. A situational analysis has been conducted first to identify community needs and the affected clientele. Relevant environmental factors were considered, and a rationale for Extension Service involvement was articulated. Program objectives have been developed to describe the anticipated end results. An educational plan of action was
developed that outlined the educational methods to be used and program resources needed to conduct the program were determined. Finally, a plan was developed for evaluating program outcomes and reporting results (Price, 1999).

The development of Extension programs has been carried out in the community context and in cooperation with local people. Involvement techniques, especially crucial in the needs assessment phase of development, have included community surveys, interviews with key informants, Delphi studies, neighborhood and community forums, participant observation and extensive use of county Extension advisory committees comprised of local volunteers. By using a variety of involvement techniques which facilitate the active participation of community members, Extension educators have ensured highly relevant educational programs, and the process of program development itself has become a meaningful learning experience for the people involved (Galbraith & Price, 1991).

Families and youth have been an important clientele in the land grant movement. The 4-H Youth Development Program has been an educational component of the land grant university outreach program that was instrumental in addressing the issues which youth face today (Miller & Snider, 1994). The 4-H and Youth Development Base Program of the Cooperative Extension System has focused on building lifelong learning skills that develop youths' potential. 4-H programs have been designed to engage youth in healthy learning experiences, thus increasing self-esteem and problem solving skills (USDA, 1994).
The Ohio State University is the land grant institution which administers the Ohio 4-H Youth Development education program. Its mission has been to develop youth to reach their fullest potential as capable, competent, caring and contributing citizens (Ohio State University Extension, 1995A). Extension 4-H professionals at the county level have been responsible for developing and teaching dynamic, effective, educational activities which support this youth development mission at the local level.

In 1994-95 the National 4-H Strategic Direction Team developed a strategic plan for 4-H programs nationally. Six strategies were developed by the Strategic Direction Team for implementing the mission and vision of the 4-H program. Strategy Two of the Strategic Plan called for "building a world leader image" for the 4-H program. Steps to accomplish this plan included "understanding current perceptions of the 4-H and Youth development program." The plan stated that "customers and partners will be frequently consulted to ensure that progress toward a new 4-H image occurs in harmony with their changing needs" (USDA, 1994, p. 5).

Strategy Five of the Strategic Plan was as follows: "Involving Youth: Youth will be actively involved as equal partners and recognized as resources in defining, developing, implementing, and continually diversifying and improving 4-H and youth development educational programs" (USDA, 1994, pg. 7). Although the Strategic Plan has been developed at the national level, its success will depend on implementation at the local level where Extension professionals have the ability and responsibility to interact with local clientele on a daily basis. The two portions of the Strategic plan outlined above follow the practice of significant involvement of clientele in the determination of Extension
programming. While most examples of clientele involvement in program development have involved adults (Brookfield, 1983; Forest, 1989; Prawl, Medlin & Gross, 1984), the National 4-H Strategic Plan clearly charged youth development professionals with utilizing program development processes which involve young people.

**Problem Statement**

Professional 4-H staff have been expected to maintain a dynamic, effective, educational program, which strives for excellence in youth and adult learning. 4-H programs must be flexible enough to meet the needs, backgrounds, and interests of people at the county level while at the same time, be reflective of the basic objectives and purposes of Ohio State University Extension (Ohio State University Extension, 1995A).

An ongoing responsibility of professional 4-H staff has been to develop and plan activities to meet programmatic goals. The National 4-H Strategic Plan emphasized the need to involve youth and to utilize their perceptions in the development of 4-H programs.

Regular adult advisory committee meetings, consisting of volunteers, and informal contact with volunteers, has contributed the majority of input regarding 4-H programming to the Union county Extension staff. No significant input has been gathered from the largest clientele group of the program: Union County 4-H members. Reasons for this lack of input were threefold:

1. Professional staff had limited contact with members. Most direct contact was made by adult volunteers.
2. When professional staff had contact with members, it was in a teaching or task-oriented situation which left no time for input beyond the activity being conducted.

3. The Union County 4-H program included no procedure for gathering input (perceptions) from members on an ongoing or intermittent basis.

Knowledge of members' perceptions about the 4-H program would be valuable to professional staff and advisory committees as they strive to develop effective activities to achieve their mission. Information regarding the perceptions of Union County 4-H community club members about their 4-H program was not available.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Union county community club members about the Union County 4-H program (Strategy #2 of the National 4-H Strategic Plan). Secondly, the researcher explored the question of whether members' perceptions differed based on their age. Finally, it was a goal of this research to develop a process for gathering members' perceptions which could be used on a repeated basis in this location or in other programming units for program development (Strategy #5 of the National 4-H Strategic Plan).
Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe 4-H members who participated in this study with the following characteristics: age, ethnicity, gender, and length of membership.

2. Determine the perceptions of Union County 4-H community club members regarding the Union county program and their experiences.

3. Determine whether 4-H member's perceptions about the program differ with age.

4. Develop a process for gathering input from community club members which may be applicable to other county 4-H programs.

Significance of the Study

Despite the emphasis on clientele input to develop programming, the 4-H program has not historically utilized the input of youth, or program participants in program development (Rennekamp, 1993). While youth age 9-13 represent approximately 81.3% of 4-H participation in Ohio (Ohio State University, 1995B), there are few examples in Extension literature to indicate that their opinions are sought or utilized in program development.

In 1995, Ohio State University Extension, in an effort to improve performance as an organization, undertook an effort to apply the management principles of Continuous Quality Improvement to Extension programming efforts. This and other related management trends within Ohio State University Extension have indicated to professional staff the need to identify clientele, along with their needs, wants, and preferences related
to non-formal education. A major portion of inservice training time was devoted to this topic at the Ohio State University Extension Annual Conference for professional staff in December, 1995. Despite this training, no venture has been made to apply the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement to the 4-H Youth Development program. G. Gibbons (personal communication, May 11, 1996). The National Strategic Plan for 4-H also identified consulting with youth as partners, and understanding the perceptions of youth, as important elements in achieving the National 4-H mission and vision. Lack of information from the predominant clientele group seriously limited the ability of the 4-H program to implement the Continuous Quality Improvement philosophy and the National 4-H Strategic Plan.

Program development at the local level primarily has been the responsibility of county extension professionals. This responsibility has competed with many others for professional time. Programming decisions often have been made with limited input due to scarce time or resources to devote to gathering information from clientele. However, if people are true partners in decision making, they must be included as a part of the planning phase from the beginning, and play important roles in creating, implementing, evaluating, and revising Extension programs (Howard, Baker & Forest, 1994).

During the 1980's and 1990's there has been a major cultural shift relating to participation. An increasingly aware and sophisticated public has demanded participation at the grassroots level. The growing demand for participation has stemmed from various sources: the rapid rise of social and technological change; the increasing size and
complexity of organizations; and an increasing questioning of the effectiveness of
democratic representation (Howard, Baker, & Forest, 1994).

This study addressed the problem of the need for input from clientele in the Union
county 4-H program. This study was significant because the overall goal of this research
was to gather input, for program development purposes, from the largest client group of
the 4-H program: youth in community clubs.

Limitations of the Study

1. The scope of this study was limited to the Union county 4-H program. Therefore
   the results are only generalizable to other programs to the extent that such
   programs are similar to the program studied. It was not the intent of this study to
   generate results which may be applied to other settings, but instead to generate
   information which would be specific to the county and its clientele, for use within
   this specific setting.

2. The scope of this study was limited to community club members, which
   represented the largest percentage (58%) of participation within the program.

3. Nine year olds, all of whom were first year members, were excluded from this
   study because data collection occurred at the beginning of the programming year,
   before they would have an opportunity to participate in activities and develop
   perceptions about the 4-H program.
Assumptions

For purposes of this study, the researcher assumed that:

1. Self reporting, through group interviews, was an appropriate method to determine perceptions of young people.

2. Self reported perceptions of youth were a reliable source of information for program development.

Definition of Terms

4-H membership: Eligibility for 4-H community club membership begins when a young person enters third grade or is age 9 as of January 1, and ends on December 31 of the year in which an individual attains the age of 19 (age on January 1st must be 18). 4-H membership starts once an eligible individual enrolls in a 4-H group or activity which provides a planned series of educational experiences, under the direction of a trained adult, and within the scope and supervision of Ohio State University Extension. For purposes of this study, 4-H community club membership was considered to be all youth with completed enrollment cards on file in the Union County office of Ohio State University Extension as of April 1, 1996.

Community club: In the Ohio 4-H program, a community club has been defined as a collection of two or more youth who meet regularly under the direction a club advisor to conduct business, plan the club’s program, and enroll in a variety of 4-H projects. Project learning has been conducted on a self study basis or in project groups where instruction has been provided to either direct or supplement the project experience. For this study,
the definition of a community club was operationalized as a chartered club of five or more youth, age 9-18, who met a minimum of eight times per calendar year. A community club was led by adult volunteer advisors, trained by the Union County 4-H program.

Club Advisor: An adult volunteer who meets regularly with and provides leadership for educational experiences within a 4-H club.

Extension 4-H professional: An individual paid to work for the Extension 4-H organization in any position which includes a 4-H program delivery role with primary focus on educational, planning, or managerial-type duties. This may include faculty and non-faculty staff, including paraprofessionals, assuming the previously specified criteria have been met. The position can be either full or part-time.

Summary

This chapter has presented the background information, problem statement, purpose and objectives, limitations and assumptions for this study on obtaining more significant youth input in the 4-H Youth Development program planning process. Chapter Two reviews the literature related to youth input in program development, as well as research regarding the perceptions of the 4-H program. A review of focus group interview methodology and a profile of Union county are also found in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three outlines the data collection method and analysis procedures which were used to conduct this study. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study, and Chapter Five contains a summary of this study, conclusions, and recommendations for the Union County 4-H program and for further research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Section one of this chapter will review the Extension literature in which youth input was sought for program development purposes. This study focused on perceptions of 4-H as a useful type of input for program development. Therefore, section two of this chapter will examine previous studies which have collected perceptions of the 4-H program from members. Section three includes information on the use of focus groups to collect perceptual information and a review of research concerning focus groups with youth. Because this study focused specifically on the Union County 4-H program, a profile of Union county will conclude this chapter.

Youth Input in Program Development

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study described the need for a larger role for youth within the Union County 4-H program development process. Figure 1 describes the current method and degree of input toward 4-H programming available to youth participants, adult participants, non-participants, and Extension professionals. A comparison of the current and ideal degree of input indicated a need for additional input from youth. Figure 1 also indicates that a larger degree of input from youth should be balanced by slightly less input from adult participants, which currently have had the largest
### Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Union County 4-H Program Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Input</th>
<th>Method of Input</th>
<th>Current Degree of Input</th>
<th>Ideal Degree of Input</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Participants</strong></td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Club Advisors</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cloverbud Advisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key Leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Participants</strong></td>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Club Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cloverbud Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Enrichment Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Emphasis Participants</td>
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<td><strong>Non-Participants</strong></td>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>Decision Making Role</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>District &amp; State Staff</td>
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Program Development

*Curriculum*
*Volunteers*
*Recognition and Awards*
*Membership*
*Committees*
*Promotion and Visibility*
*Older Youth*
*Evaluation and Accountability*
degree of input, along with Extension professionals. This study focused specifically on

  gaining input from youth involved in community clubs, as indicated in the shaded area in

Figure 1. Rennekamp (1993) noted that Extension involvement of youth in program
development has been limited at best, despite the continuing call by some youth

  empowerment advocates to give youth an active voice in identifying issues and designing

  programs which have direct impact upon their lives.

  To explore the typical role of youth in program development, this researcher discussed

  the role of youth in program development with Extension 4-H professionals from 17

  counties in the Southwest district of Ohio State University Extension (personal

  communication, May 14, 1996). Specifically, Extension professionals discussed the

  number of youth involved in their respective county 4-H advisory committees. While

  4-H advisory committees have not been the only source of program development input, no

  county reported formally soliciting youth input in any other form. A summary of the

  discussion was as follows; on average 4-H advisory committees had 15.5% youth

  committee members, with a range from 0.0% (no youth members) to a high of 33.0% No

  county had youth members age 9-13, all youth members were 14-18 years old. Advisory

  committees had an average of 20.8 total members (including youth members). When

  asked to describe the degree of involvement by youth in advisory committee work, equal

  numbers of 4-H professionals (41.0%) reported that youth were highly active or

  moderately active. Of the 19 counties in the Southwest district, 17.6% of 4-H

  professionals described youth participation in their advisory committees as low. The

  relatively small percentage of youth advisory committee members found in this discussion
documented that utilizing adult input to develop programs for youth has been the norm in Extension program development. Numerous examples exist within Extension literature in which the opinions or perceptions of adults have been sought to develop various aspects of 4-H youth programs (Burketts, 1984; Clinkscales, 1984; Horton, 1983; Larkin, 1980; Mullen, 1980; VanNostran, 1977). While youth have been the focus of 4-H programming, they have seldom been engaged as participants in the development of program efforts.

A few instances exist within Extension literature of the utilization of youth input to develop programs or guide the direction of current programming. In a study of leadership life skills development, Seevers and Dormody (1995) reported that 4-H members indicated their greatest involvement in leadership activities was in implementing (88.2%), followed by evaluating (69.7%). Only 49.7% of the respondents indicated involvement in planning leadership activities. Seevers and Dormody stated that one possible explanation for this finding was that adults who work with 4-H programs may not be providing youth the opportunity to be involved in the total leadership process. Small and Hug (1991) reported the use of an effort titled Teen Assessment Project (TAP) which was implemented in over 60 communities in Wisconsin. TAP involved the administration of a questionnaire to high school aged teens about their concerns, behaviors, and perceptions, and then making this information available to youth serving organizations in those 60 communities. An example of a finding by the TAP survey in one community was depression and thoughts of suicide by ninth and tenth grade adolescent girls. This finding resulted in programming on suicide prevention and treatment of depression for teens, parents, and teachers in this community.
Acosta and Holt (1991) surveyed seventh through twelfth grade 4-H members in the Louisiana 4-H program about topics which they would like to have additional information about, and what topics they did not wish to learn more about. These researchers found that the emotional, physical, and psychological adjustments of the teen years received substantial interest ratings across all grade levels, with at least 50% of each group listing it among the top five areas. Topics that had been the mainstays of 4-H programming; health, safety, nutrition, stress management, citizenship and consumerism, were not of primary interest to the teens. Acosta and Holt reported that the overall outcome of redesigning programs based on the results of the survey was a 21% increase in teen 4-H membership retention over a two year period.

In 1993, participants in the W.K Kellogg sponsored Youth Development Institute (Rennekamp, 1993) were studied to assess how youth would rate the performance of adults in youth serving roles and youth serving agencies. Youth in this study also rated twelve contemporary issues according to how often they thought about a particular concern. A unique feature of this study was that adult participants compared their perceptions of youth concerns with that of the data generated directly from youth. A discrepancy existed between the youth ranking and what the adult ranking of what they believed the youth ranking would be. The top three concerns of youth were: a) Earning a living, b) Education beyond high school and c) Caring for family members. Adults ranked these concerns second, tenth, and seventh respectively. Adults ranked crime and violence as the topic they thought would be of highest concern to the youth. This topic ranked ninth on the youths' list of concerns. Rennekamp stated that this study made a strong case
for youth involvement in issues identification and program design to achieve accuracy in programming.

Bennett and Norland (1993) investigated satisfaction with participation among older 4-H youth. They found substantial positive relationships between satisfaction with 4-H participation and quality club meetings (.86), commitment (.62), responsibility (.59), working with younger members (.59), and positive parental support (.51). Moderate positive relationships were found between satisfaction and the opportunity to participate in "older member" activities (.44), positive experiences with competition (.42), and participation in club, county, state, and national activities (.35), between satisfaction and advisor participation (.28), tenure as a 4-H member (.23), number and type of projects taken (.22), and peer pressure (.11). No relationship was found between the level of family involvement and satisfaction and no difference was found between urban and rural respondents on level of satisfaction.

In a study of Shelby County, Ohio youth, Archer (1991) interviewed four strata of youth and asked how they spent their time, what goals they had set, what their problems were, how they solved problems, and how they liked to receive information. This information was summarized for use by all Shelby County youth serving agencies, including Ohio State University Extension. Archer found that sports and games comprised the prime usage of youth time. Parents and friends influenced how youth spent time. Archer further reported that most youth aspire to higher educational levels but received limited assistance in establishing goals. Youth in the study reported their primary concern as being the well-being of their families, and their own well-being. Youth coped
with problems by talking with parents or friends, but there was a sense of self-reliance in dealing with their problems. Good teaching approaches supported by appropriate visual aids was the preferred method which youth identified to receive new information.

Keith and Hoopfer (1985) collected information from 304 youth in grades five through eight as part of the Michigan Early Adolescent Survey. A small portion of this survey focused on youth perceptions about being in youth groups. Findings related to youth groups were that 70% of early adolescents said that they had gained a skill or knowledge because of their participation in a group. One third reported that they had met new friends, and one third said they had learned responsibility from belonging to a group. When asked what, if anything, they disliked about being in a youth group, the early adolescents answered: other members, uninteresting meetings, and losing. Twenty two percent of the early adolescents interviewed in this study were 4-H members.

**Perceptions of the 4-H Program**

Many studies of re-enrollment and program drop out by members have investigated the relationship between characteristics of members and the likelihood of re-enrollment or drop out (Caplinger, 1982; Coop and Clark, 1961; Cunningham, 1959; Dodge, 1957; Gehres, 1959; Jordan, 1971; McClure, Carter, and Dotson, 1972; Sabrosky, 1957; Stowe, 1963; and Tucker, 1957). Few re-enrollment studies, however, have collected information from members about their perceptions of the 4-H program, relying instead on demographic variables such as age at first enrollment, gender, and project experiences as the possible predictors of noncontinuation or re-enrollment.
Some studies of re-enrollment/program drop out have included the collection of perceptual or attitudinal information from members. Caplinger (1982) reported that when asked about their attitude toward different aspects of their project work, two statements showed a moderate relationship with re-enrollment. "Earning money from 4-H projects" and "liking project work" were both reported as moderately associated (Cramer's $V = .57$) with re-enrollment. Caplinger also gathered re-enrollee’s perceptions of ten 4-H activities, using a five point Likert scale. The three most favored activities by re-enrollees were Fashion Review (4.49), County Fair (4.46) and 4-H Camp (4.39).

Lyle (1958) surveyed older youth who had been 4-H members for at least two years, comparing dropouts to re-enrollees, and concluded that members tend to re-enroll in clubs which:

1. Provided a variety of activities at their regular meeting and see that members are aware of them.

2. Conducted some type of event in addition to regular meetings.

3. Perform certain activities within the community or as part of the 4-H organization.

4. Provided opportunities for members participation in demonstrations, judging, recreation, and so forth at regular meetings.

5. Allowed members to take part in planning and executing local club programs.

6. Informed members about the county 4-H organization and allow them to take part in planning and executing the county program.
7. Allowed members leadership responsibilities in the local club and the county organization.

Another factor which has been studied in relation to the re-enrollment of 4-H members was their perceptions about the overall 4-H program. Coop and Clark (1961) reported that members were more likely to re-enroll when they felt that their 4-H experiences had been worthwhile and satisfying. McClure, Carter and Dotson (1972) reported that continued membership in 4-H was positively related to members' attitudes and interest in 4-H activities.

Attitudes toward the 4-H program have been reported as a reason for dropping out of 4-H. In a study of 6th grade youth, Kreitlow, Pierce, and Middleton (1961) reported that lack of interest by 23% of youth was their primary reason for not joining 4-H. Club availability, or lack thereof, was another important reason cited. One third of the dropouts questioned in this study indicated that they dropped out because the club program was weak.

Stevenin (1990) conducted a study for the National 4-H Council which included youth and adults who were active participants in the program and four focus groups with youth who were non-members or former members. The findings of this study of youth program participants were that active 4-H youth were reasonably satisfied with the 4-H program and products. Other findings included:

1. Young people wanted programs/products that were fun, where they could become personally involved, such as self esteem building activities or the expressive arts.
2. Young people very much disliked 4-H meetings which were adult dominated.

3. Respondents said they felt pressured to do more with 4-H once they joined.

4. Respondents disliked 4-H because there was no leadership role for them, they were "passive participants".

5. Respondents disliked a focus on projects versus themselves.

Collins (1986) studied attitudes of current 4-H members versus dropouts relative to competition in the 4-H program. Collins reported that dropouts were found to have a significantly more positive attitude toward competition than members. Both groups had negative attitudes toward competition. Collins hypothesized that dropouts may have had more positive attitudes once they were away from the competition, while the members were still involved. Another alternative was that adequate competitive situations were not provided for some of these dropouts. Gender, age, and number of years enrolled in 4-H had no significant effect on the attitude toward competition. According to Collins those with one or two years of membership had the most positive attitude, while those in 4-H for seven or more years had the lowest attitude scores.

Gehres (1959) conducted a study of the interests and value of 4-H club experiences as perceived by 4-H junior leaders in Ohio. Gehres' major conclusions were:

1. The experiences most interesting to the entire group involved working with their projects and camping.
2. The experiences rated as least valuable and interesting were activities involving health, safety, and planning for future meetings.

3. Junior Leaders indicated that activities such as putting on demonstrations for younger members as more valuable than interesting. Girls rated these experiences higher than boys as to interest and value.

4. Exhibiting their projects at the county fair or other events and helping at the Junior Fair were rated higher for interest by boys than by girls.

5. Both boys and girls valued camping less as they grew older.

Thorburn (1960) studied the differences in perceptions between 14-17 year old members and drop outs in Knox County, Ohio. Thorburn's conclusions were that both groups placed similar values on experiences including project work, leadership activities, recreation, miscellaneous 4-H activities and camp activities. He noted work conflicts for boys and marriage for girls as being the prime reason for loss of interest in 4-H activities.

Fisher (1982) studied the attitudes and perceptions of 4-H teens about their Junior Leadership experiences and other aspects of the Junior Leadership program. Findings of this study related to the perceptions of members about 4-H included:

1. Respondents indicated that the most valuable leadership activities they had participated in were helping with Junior Fair activities, teaching a younger member something about their project, and being a camp counselor.

2. Respondents ranked the most important purpose of Junior Leadership to be: (a) learning to lead groups, (b) meeting people and friends, and (c) assisting advisors in leading a community club.
3. The areas of training needed rated highest by the Junior Leaders in this study were: (a) how to motivate 4-H members to participate, (b) how to recruit new members, and (c) styles and concepts about leadership.

4. The category of recognition most frequently chosen as the type they would like to receive was certificates, plaques and trophies. Recognition by advisors and the 4-H agent was also mentioned.

Snyder (1981) studied the attitude of 4-H teens toward selection of non-traditional projects. Snyder concluded that if positive attitude toward self is increased, gender biased attitudes are reduced and stronger attitudes toward the parent(s) as a significant other are obtained, then non-traditional projects may be selected.

Sargeant (1977) studied the attitudes of Ohio 4-H Junior Leaders regarding the Junior Leadership contract project. Sargeant found relationships between the attitudes of Junior Leaders toward contracting and selected variables such as age, gender, activities and training received. Other studies have also been conducted to determine 4-H members attitudes or opinions about specific 4-H events or activities. For example, studies have sought to determine what reasons 4-H members would give for why they did or did not attend 4-H camp (Andrus, 1983; Bruny, 1957; Deel, 1976).

Focus Group Methodology

A critical requirement of this study was to select a data collection technique which would facilitate the acquisition of opinions, perceptions and attitudes from youth ages
10-18. The data collection technique chosen to be most appropriate for this study was focus group interviews.

According to Greenbaum (1988), a focus group interview is a qualitative research technique which includes eight to ten persons brought to a centralized location to respond to questions on a topic of particular interest to a sponsor or client. The interview is led by a moderator who keeps the respondents 'focused' on a particular topic. The focus group is generally conducted for applied purposes. It is ordinarily conducted in a setting formally established for the interview; the moderator is directive, and the interview questions are purposive and usually somewhat structured (Frey & Fontana, 1988).

According to Krueger (1988), focus group interviews typically have five characteristics or features. These characteristics relate to the ingredients of a focus group: (a) people, (b) who possess certain characteristics, (c) provide data, (d) of a qualitative nature, (e) in a focused discussion.

Focus groups are typically composed of seven to ten people, but the size can range from as few as four to as many as twelve. Focus groups are composed of people who are similar to each other. The nature of this homogeneity is determined by the purpose of the study. This homogeneity can be broadly or narrowly defined. Focus groups are usually composed of people who do not know each other (Krueger, 1988).

**Appropriate Uses of the Focus Group Method**

Focus group interviews have been widely accepted within marketing research because they produce believable results at a reasonable cost. It has been a particularly appropriate
procedure to use when the goal is to explain how people regard an experience, idea or event (Krueger, 1988).

Focus groups pay attention to the perceptions of the users and consumers of solutions, products and services. Focus groups have a rather narrow purpose for which they work particularly well; that is, to determine the perceptions, feelings, and manner of thinking of consumers about products, services or opportunities. Focus groups are not intended to develop consensus, to arrive at an agreeable plan or to make decisions about which course of action to take (Krueger, 1988). When a research topic involves understanding the success or failure of a particular program in a specific setting, focus groups may well be the most efficient and effective tool for uncovering the reasons behind the outcome (Morgan and Krueger, 1993).

Morgan and Krueger (1993) outlined several circumstances when focus groups would be a particularly advantageous research method to use due to the interaction among participants:

1. When there is a power differential between participants and decision makers.
2. When there is a gap between professionals and their target audiences.
3. When investigating complex behavior and motivations.
4. To learn more about the degree of consensus on a topic.
5. When you need a friendly research method that is respectful and not condescending to your target audience.
Focus groups allow a researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of the subjects' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and experiences. Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996) wrote that focus groups are particularly relevant when studying children and adolescents because of children's use of jargon that is specific to their age group and cultural domain.

Focus Groups with Children

A review of the literature pertaining to conducting focus groups with children and adolescents suggested several modifications to the standard focus group interview format when interviewing youth. According to McDonald and Topper (1988), group research with children can be categorized in three ways:

1. The adult oriented approach treats children as small adults and allows for no modifications for the children's developmental levels.

2. The Creative-Drama approach treats children as children and simulates the school environment. The moderator acts as a teacher facilitating game-like activities calling upon the children's creativity.

3. The Structural approach treats children as children but recognizes their different developmental stages and makes accommodations for these differences. The children's ability to speak of their own experiences and to perform structured tasks is more valued than their creativity.

Those methodologies that recognize and make accommodations for children's varying developmental stages are the most effective. The activities to be used should depend upon the research questions (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). Modifications suggested in
the literature for conducting focus groups with children included age, group characteristics, facilities, length of focus group, and group process.

Age  Children over six years of age, in most cases, have been effective focus group participants (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). Another recommendation was that participants be no more than two years apart in age (Spethmann, 1992). Spethmann (1992) also recommended not including too many age levels because physical size differences may be intimidating for some participants.

With regard to an upper age limit, Greenbaum (1988) stated that most researchers have found that it is possible to have productive traditional focus groups beginning with younger teenagers. Greenbaum suggested that attention must be given to the range of ages in the session, separation of genders, and frequent use of external stimuli to help participants focus their attention toward specific topic areas and that the subject matter is of interest to them.

Group Characteristics  It was recommended that the size of a focus group for young people needs to be smaller than for adults. Recommendations ranged from five-six per group (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996) to six-ten per group (Spethmann, 1992). Literature sources agreed that ideally the younger the participants are, the more desirable it is to have groups of the same gender, rather than mixed groups.

Greenbaum (1988) explained that researchers have differing views on the aspect of whether groups should consist of children who are strangers or children who generally know each other. Researchers who felt children's groups should be conducted among those who know each other believed that the output of the session will be richer if the
children have had a prior relationship since they would not have to be inhibited by the unfamiliar group (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Other researchers (Krueger, 1994; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) felt that children should not know each other prior to the group experience because normal peer relationships and pecking order would affect the inputs obtained.

Facilities The literature contained general recommendations about adapting a facility to a youth focus group. Suggestions included choosing a size of room that is neither too large so as to be intimidating or too small, thus stifling movement or activities. A flexible furniture arrangement was also reported to be desirable. Krueger (1994) suggested that teen focus groups may work better if conducted outside of institutions such as churches, schools, and recreation centers which are run by adults.

Length of Focus Group The length of focus groups with young participants would generally be shorter than the 90 minutes recommended for adults. Krueger (1994) recommended that discussions may need to be 60 minutes or less with preteens. Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996) stated that focus groups with children should be approximately 45 minutes in length for children under 10 years of age and around 60 minutes for children between 10-14 years of age. Greenbaum (1988) pointed out that, as with adult sessions, the length of the discussion would depend upon how interesting it is to the participants.

Group Process Greenbaum (1988) reported that the implementation of effective focus groups with children would require some modification in the process of conducting the sessions compared to the typical approach when working with adults. A number of
suggestions were included in the literature for adapting the focus group interview process
to children. Possible adaptations mentioned in many literature sources (Greenbaum, 1988;
Krueger, 1994; McDonald & Topper, 1988; Spethmann, 1992; Vaughn, Schumm &
Sinagub, 1996; Winski, 1992) included:

1. Make children feel at ease. Utilize a get acquainted activity if participants
   are strangers.

2. Ask questions in clear, simple language.

3. Ask children negative questions first to relay the message that negative
   responses and opinions are acceptable.

4. Establish an environment of rapport and trust by answering questions
   openly and honestly.

5. For young children, include some type of enjoyable activity. For older
   youth, incorporate things to touch, do, or provide some type of external
   stimuli to respond to.

Profile of Union County

Union County is located in central Ohio, approximately 35 miles northwest of the
state's capital, Columbus. While primarily a rural county with over 60 percent of land
being farmed, Union County has experienced explosive growth in the early and mid 1990's
and is currently the second fastest growing county in Ohio (Stephens, 1996). In 1995,
there were 870 farms with an average size of 275 acres. The major agricultural
commodity was soybeans.
In 1992, the manufacturing industry employed the most workers, primarily due to the presence of automaker Honda of North America and various supply manufacturers of this industry. The largest Transportation Research Center (TRC) in the world is located in Union County. The center contains over 7,500 acres used for research, development and testing of transportation systems, designs and materials.

The median family income in Union County in 1992 was $37,682.00. The percent of families with incomes below the poverty level was 5.7%. The unemployment rate in 1993 was 5.4%, which ranked Union County 80th among Ohio's 88 counties (Union County Chamber of Commerce, 1992).

Marysville is the county seat and the largest city with population of 10,387 in 1992. Other villages in the county include Richwood, population 2,175; Milford Center, population 668; Magnetic Springs, population 361; Unionville Center, population 232, and part of the village of Plain City (divided by the county line) whose Union county population was 1001. The total county population in 1995 was 36,528.

The racial composition of the county was 95.61 percent Caucasian, 3.65% African American, and 0.74% other racial groups in 1992. The median age in the county in 1992 was 32.9 years. There were 5,253 students enrolled in three public school systems and three non-public schools in the county.

The Union County Department of Human Services (1996) listed 80 agencies providing services to people of Union County. Of those which provided services or offered programs directly to youth, most specialized in physical or mental health services.

The Union county 4-H Youth Development program has consisted of a variety of
elements which cumulatively form a dynamic program for youth to develop life skills. The 4-H program in Union county is open to boys and girls, ages 5-19. Community club membership is open to youth ages 9, or in third grade, as of January 1st of the program year.

In 1996, the Union County 4-H program included 953 community club members, 451 youth involved in school enrichment programming, 28 cloverbud members, 192 adult volunteers serving as club advisors and two paid professional staff members; one full and one part time. See Table 1 for a summary of types of 4-H participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Participation</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percent of County Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Clubs</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Enrichment</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloverbuds</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Advisors</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Total</td>
<td>1624</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Type of Participation in the 1996 Union County 4-H program

Adult volunteers led 64 4-H clubs throughout the county, with a slightly higher geographic concentration of clubs in the central and southern portions of the county. The average club in 1996 consisted of 12 members, with a range in size from five to 45 members.
The 4-H projects most frequently enrolled in by 4-H community club members in 1996 were: market hogs (191 projects), rabbits (136 projects), food and nutrition (112 projects), and clothing (96 projects). A total of 2,071 projects, in 166 different project areas were enrolled in by members. All Union County 4-H clubs consisted of members enrolled in a variety of projects. Approximately one fifth of clubs had some project focus, (for example: horse projects), but the majority of clubs consisted of members with a wide variety of projects. Union County 4-H community clubs represented a full range of ages from nine through 18 year olds. Some clubs consisted of primarily nine to twelve year olds.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research Design

This study was descriptive in nature and was designed to collect perceptual information from youth who were enrolled in the Union County 4-H program. The target population was divided into three age groups in order to investigate whether there were differences in perceptions based on age. For purposes of this study age groups were established as follows: 10 and 11 year olds, 12 and 13 year olds, and 14 through 18 year olds.

The study design involved conducting four group interviews within each age group of the target population. The first group within each age group served as a pilot test of the questioning route for that strata. If major modifications of the questioning route were needed after the first interview, this group's data was not included in the final analysis. If no major revisions were made in the questioning route, subsequent groups responded to the same interview questions and data from all four groups were included in the final analysis. A total of twelve group interviews were planned.
Population and Sample Selection Procedures

The target population of this study were all youth age 10-18 who were enrolled as community club members in the Union County 4-H program as of April 1, 1996. Nine year olds, who composed the largest segment of the population, were excluded from this study because they would not have been active in the program long enough to have formed perceptions about 4-H. This population consisted of 953 youth. The data in Table 2 indicated the number of youth in the target population distributed by age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Member</th>
<th>Number Of Members</th>
<th>Percent of Total Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>20.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>16.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>13.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>11.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>9.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>8.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Community Club Membership by Age, 1996 Union County 4-H
Frame error was avoided by having a complete membership list from Union County's enrollment records. Selection error was not a threat to this study because the enrollment record was free of duplications.

One objective of this study was to discover whether 4-H member's perceptions of 4-H differed with their age. In order to attain this comparison, the total membership list was divided into three lists as follows: (a) members age 10-11 as of Jan. 1, 1996, (b) members age 12-13 as of Jan. 1, 1996, (c) members age 14-18 as of Jan. 1, 1996. These age categories were used to follow the pattern of schools within the county: elementary, middle school, and high school.

Stratified random sampling was used to assure that a representative sample was drawn from the target population. Once names were selected, the researcher mailed a letter explaining the research study to the parents of each potential participant (Appendix A). Potential participants were invited to participate in this study by means of a telephone call, utilizing a prescribed invitation process (Appendix B). If a potential participant declined or could not participate due to the scheduling of the group interview time, another random draw was obtained from the list until an optimum group size was obtained. Those individuals accepting the invitation for the date identified composed each focus group. A letter confirming the acceptance to participate and the time and location of the focus group was mailed to each accepting participant (Appendix C).
Instrumentation

A focus group questioning route was developed by the researcher to collect data to determine perceptions about the Union County 4-H program. The questioning route consisted of eleven major questions. (Appendix D). Probing questions were developed to be used if more explanation of questions were needed. Questions were written by the researcher based on utility of the information for program development purposes.

A panel of experts (Appendix E) were employed to assess the content validity of the instrument. This panel was selected from individuals with knowledge about youth development programs and focus group research.

The researcher, who had received training in conducting focus groups and who had previous experience in moderating groups, served as the moderator for ten of the focus group interviews in this study. An Extension agent from another county with extensive experience in focus group research moderated the other group included in this study.

Data Collection

This study was designed to collect perceptual information from youth ages 10-18. Therefore, a method of data collection was chosen which could accommodate the diversity of cognitive, psychological, and emotional development of youth and yield reliable information.

Focus group interviews were chosen as a data collection method because:

1. Focus groups are a socially oriented procedure (Krueger, 1988). Most people feel more comfortable talking when involved in a discussion as part
of a group, therefore discussions generally are more spontaneous and honest or candid (Greenbaum, 1988).

2. Attitudes and perceptions relating to concepts and programs are developed in part by interaction with other people (Krueger, 1988). When questions are asked in a group environment the results are candid portraits of respondents’ perceptions. The open exchange of different perceptions may spark new opinions or strengthen present convictions (Hillebrandt, 1979).

3. Focus groups take place in natural, real life situations, as opposed to controlled, experimental situations. The more natural environment prompts increased candor by respondents (Krueger, 1994).

4. Focus groups allow access to attitudes and experiences of respondents (Morgan & Spanish, 1984).

5. Focus groups allow the moderator to probe to explore unanticipated issues (Krueger, 1994).

6. Focus groups have high face validity. The technique is easily understood and the results are believable. (Krueger, 1994).

A total of 11 focus groups were conducted: three groups of 10-11 year olds, four groups of 12-13 year olds and four groups of 14-18 year olds. The focus group interviews were conducted in May and June, 1996. A 12th group was not conducted due to cancellation of several participants on the day the interview was scheduled.

Focus groups were held in two locations within Union County: the Richwood Public Library and the Union County Extension office. Four groups were held in the Richwood
location and seven group interviews were held at the Extension office location.

Participants were invited to the location closest to their residence.

Each participant signed a consent form (Appendix F) upon arrival at the focus group interview, indicating that they understood the nature of the study and were participating voluntarily. The entire protocol for this study was approved by the Ohio State University Human Subjects Review committee (Appendix G).

Each focus group interview was audio tape recorded. An assistant moderator also took written notes throughout each interview. Each focus group interview lasted between 60-90 minutes. The researcher, acting as moderator, provided a brief overview of the purpose of the study and how the interview would proceed. Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions before the interview began.

Two brightly colored index cards and pencils were distributed to each participant as they entered and were seated for the interview. For the first two questions, participants were asked the question, and then asked to briefly write down their own response on their card before any verbal responses were given. This technique was employed so that each participant would become comfortable in expressing their opinions at the beginning of the interview.

For the first interview question, participants were asked to give their responses in a round robin style, in the order in which they were seated around the circle. For the remaining questions, participants were told they could respond in any order, whenever they had a comment.
At the conclusion of the formal questioning route, the researcher asked if participants had any additional comments they would like to add which they had not offered in the previous discussion. To conclude the session, the researcher thanked the participants and presented them with an item from the 4-H catalog (key chain, 4-H mug, etc.) as a token of appreciation for their time and participation.

Immediately following each interview, the researcher made notes concerning general impressions and themes of the discussion, paying particular attention to nonverbal communication used by the participants. The researcher also reviewed and filed the assistant moderator's notes for later use as part of the data set. Data regarding each participant's age, gender, race, and length of 4-H membership was obtained from 1996 Union County 4-H enrollment records.

Data Analysis

The audio tape recordings of each focus group interview were transcribed into written form by a data processing service. Immediately after each focus group the researcher prepared a set of notes containing a descriptive summary of the interview including observations about unique characteristics of participants, interactions or other occurrences during the interview. In addition, the researcher kept a file containing thoughts about the questioning route and emerging themes or questions for further exploration. These transcriptions, along with notes made by the researcher following each interview and notes taken by assistant moderators, comprised the data used for analysis.
The first level of analysis was conducted within each age group, and therefore consisted of three or four interviews of same age respondents. Answers to each focus group question were examined for recurring themes and patterns. Researcher and moderator notes were also used to confirm or disconfirm the themes which emerged. Data were cross referenced between questions and all information related to a specific topic was included in summarizing the responses to each question. A list which summarized the responses to each question was written.

The second level of analysis was a comparison of the data across age groups. The researcher utilized the narratives and lists generated in the first level of analysis to compare and contrast perceptions of respondents across age groups. The three summaries (by age group) for each question were compared. The researcher reported differences and similarities among age groups in list form. A final summary of the differences and similarities of perceptions across age groups was prepared.

Relevant quotes which characterized or typified findings were included to illustrate findings in the final summary. The identity of individual respondents was never revealed, due to the group nature of the data, and the assurance of confidentiality to the participants.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to address the lack of input into program development by youth participants of the Union County 4-H program. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Union County community club members about the Union County 4-H program. The objectives of the study were to demographically describe the members who participated on the characteristics of age, ethnicity, gender, and length of membership, to determine the perceptions about the 4-H program, to determine whether their perceptions differed based on age, and to test this process of gathering youth input for possible use by other county 4-H programs. This chapter discusses the findings related to each of these objectives.

Objective 1: To Describe 4-H Members Who Participated In This Study By The Following Characteristics: Age, Ethnicity, Gender, and Length Of Membership.

A total of 77 4-H members participated in the focus group interviews. Of those, 31 were males and 46 were females. For purposes of this study, age was defined as the age
of the 4-H member as of January 1, 1996. Table 3 describes the interview participants by age group and by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-11 yr. olds</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13 yr. olds</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18 yr. olds</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Gender of focus group participants by age group.

All 4-H members who participated in the focus groups described their ethnicity as Caucasian on their 4-H enrollment forms. This reflected the population, as there were very few other ethnic groups within the 4-H membership, or in the general population of youth in Union County.

Table 4 describes the length of membership of participants. The data in this table indicated that the focus group participants as a group had fewer members as years of membership increased. First year members were not included in this study because they would not have had time to develop perceptions of many typical 4-H activities, as this study was done early in the 4-H membership year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Membership (in years)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Table 4: Participants by length of membership.

**Objective 2: To Determine the Perceptions of Union County Community Club Members Regarding the Union County 4-H Program and their Experiences**

Eleven focus groups were conducted with 4-H members to discuss their perceptions of 4-H. Each group was asked to respond to the same series of questions. The following findings are related to perceptions and are organized by the 11 questions used in the focus group interviews.
**Question 1: What do you like best about 4-H?**

Upon arrival at the focus group interview, each participant was given a card with this question printed on it and a pencil. They were instructed to think about the question until the focus group interview started and write a brief response on the card. The focus group began with an introduction by the moderator which described the procedures for the interview, then the first question was asked by the moderator. Participants were invited to refer to their card or, if they had just arrived, to respond to the question when they had an answer.

Responses to this question strongly emphasized the following:

(a) learning and doing new things,

(b) making friends and meeting people,

(c) working with animals, and

(d) having fun.

There was a prevailing theme of the desirability of interaction with other people throughout the responses to this question. For example, 4-H camp was popular because of the opportunity to meet people and be with friends. The fairs were favored because of the chance to be with friends. The common theme of activities described as fun were things which involved doing new things and/or doing things with other people.

The following are characteristic responses related to learning and doing new things:

"It teaches you a lot of things. I've noticed that people that go to my school don't know how to do like cooking and sewing, simple things like a button, but kids in my class just can't do it. I think that is one of the best things it teaches. Even if you are just in it for a few years you have a chance to learn some things. I don't know much about the farm animal end of it, but the rest of it, I've learned a lot."
"It teaches a lot of responsibility, an a lot of people wouldn't have the ambition to finish a project...to actually do all the work that it would entail. Like in the real world, if you have a project, you need to finish it. A lot of people may go into it, they don't have the experience of actually dedicating themselves to it."

"It teaches you like a lot of skills that you can use later in life, what you need when you are all grown up."

"It has definitely given me a lot more confidence going along with that. I am more confident talking out in groups. I've become a lot more outgoing because of 4-H groups. Everything I have had to do with camp and Fair Board and then within my own club and helping kids with demonstrations and giving demonstrations in the club, I have become a lot more talkative."

"What I like best about 4-H is the learning part of it. You learn a bunch from it. You get to go to the fair and show your animals and have fun."

"I like the fair and I like meeting new people and learning new things."

The following comments are representative of those related to making friends and meeting people:

"The opportunities it gives you to meet people, that's the thing I really think about. I really love 4-H camp and Fair Board. I've met so many people, have made a lot of friends...it's going to change my life, and that's really important for me. I think its important for everyone, and I hope that everyone is able to do that."

"Its a good common link between a lot of people...not just even with your own age...like meeting people within generations, because when I started 4-H, people said to me, oh yeah, I was in 4-H when I was a kid and your grandma was in 4-H..."

"Just the involvement and making new friends. Little things like there are a lot of people in my club that I don't know very well this year because there are so many new members and we all got together and did Lollipop day out at Walmart, so that is a good way of meeting people and having fun but you don't have to sit through a meeting, you can have fun while you are doing 4-H."
"The thing I probably like best about 4-H is it gives me a lot of valuable practice in dealing with people who come from a different way of people in the work than like my friends at school and stuff like that."

"I like being with my friends too, and all the activities that my club does."

"I kind of like the fair a lot. I like it, but because you like get to show what you've done the whole year to the public and everything, and you see all your other friends that are in 4-H then too."

Typical participant comments related to working with animals are listed below:

"The thing I like about 4-H is taking animals to the fair and showing them off."

"The thing I like best about 4-H is how it gives us certain opportunities. We can do stuff with like animals and stuff like that. It encourages us to do stuff and it also gives us something to do in the summer. Something other than just sitting around at home wasting our life in front of the TV or something like that."

"I like showing cows and taking care of animals with 4-H."

"I like the part where you get to work with a certain animal and you get to learn more about that subject. It's kind of nice to get a closer feel what it's like working with that animal."

"I like the fair and working spending time with animals and doing fund raisers and stuff like that."

Examples of the respondents comments about having fun are presented below:

"I like the wonderful opportunity to make new friends, and I also like the feeling that I know whenever I go somewhere that has to do with 4-H that we always have fun."

"I would be upset [if couldn't be in 4-H] because my friends and I have a ton of fun at the fair, and so we wouldn't have that fun-just learning and doing the projects, getting money."

"I probably tell them [referring to friends] that is fun and you can learn new things."
Question 2: What would you change about 4-H?

Participants also had been given this question printed on a card when they arrived. Overall, focus group participants had difficulty answering this question. Many simply responded that they could not think of anything to change. There was no dominant theme related to this question. Individual responses from participants tended to be discussed further by the rest of the group because other participants did not have a comment to offer on this question.

Of the responses that were given to this question, many of them were not related to the 4-H program. The responses given were frequently related to Jr. Fairs. For example:

"Make the fair longer."

"I show horses and what I do like if you see people cheating, then everyone turns against you it is really bad because it's getting big... you have to buy expensive animals to be a top one, so I had to go out and had to buy this expensive horse just to be a top one, an it is getting really bad."

"Well last year there were showing two [referring to sheep classes] at the same time, like the same breed at different ends of the building, and it just made it kind of hectic for the judge, getting your animal in and out really quick."

"People are spending more money on animals, which doesn't really, I mean the parent are helping out. the parents are trying to take over or something like that. really 4-H is for the kids and trying to get kids to learn stuff and not rally too much for the competition. That's what I think 4-H was created for. I think it has strayed off it's path a little."

"Well I like rabbits a lot, and there are chickens in that barn and I don't really like chickens. They like carry a lot of diseases and there should be like a barn for chickens and a barn for rabbits because not very many people like both."
"I think they should change where the goats are because the tent gets very wet there."

".... at the auction if you like sell your animals, its hard to find the owner and thank them. Like last year my brother never got to thank the owner and they just took his rabbits."

"I would change how they judge at the Marion fair because they judge you unequally. I was standing next to someone and their animal was jumping all around and mine wasn't and they got first place and I didn't place at all."

One recommendation for change which surfaced was the desire for change related to 4-H project books. Two ideas were expressed related to project materials: (a) more books on the same topic, a topical series for example, and (b) overall content covered in some books. Examples of participants’ comments on this topic are as follows:

"I think there should be more ideas for like long projects, let's say like flowers I think you need like you need more projects with it that you can do-more ideas on growing annual flowers, that kind of stuff. I would have done that again this year if you had more projects for it."

"More continuation of projects. There is like one project....most of the ones I've taken there is like one, and I've run out of projects to take because I can't really take a lot of livestock."

"I think with a lot of the livestock books like I take, I do a poultry project every year and its the same book every year and you really don't learn anything new. I guess I learn a lot because my dad knows about chickens, but the books don't give you anymore information. They are just the same ones every year."

"One of the things I would probably change is like how much some of the project books really relate to life. I know that some of them are for 9 year olds, so I have a little bit different perspective than others, but I know Microwaving I and II, its just like they teach you what buttons mean on the microwave and that kind of thing....and I think there are some things that could be done just in the project books to make them interesting for everyone."

"Some of the projects that are geared toward older kids, maybe the book should be more detailed information."
"I'd like to see more project in careers and stuff, like the careers in the real world, so you can get ready for it and stuff....I want to be a veterinarian and I want more projects on veterinarian stuff."

Question 3: What do you think of the activities and events that are offered in 4-H?

Responses to this question indicated very clearly that participants most closely identified with club level activities. Some participants had difficulty understanding this question initially because they did not identify with the county-level examples given by the moderator. However, once some participants began discussing their club activities, most everyone had comments to offer on their own club activities.

The moderator frequently asked a probing question to elicit opinions about county level 4-H activities and events. Despite this, the discussion focused on club level activities almost exclusively across all age groups. Most participants responded to this question by describing their favorite activities, which again were almost exclusively club-based activities. Examples given by participants of their favorite activities included:

(a) trips and tours: businesses, farms, museums, local points of interest, zoo, Cedar Point, canoeing, etc.;

(b) community service projects: including cleaning streets, road sides, parks, visiting nursing homes, write letter to military personnel, planting flowers, etc.;

(c) club parties: swimming, bowling, pizza, hay rides;

(d) fund raisers: making and selling sub sandwiches, bake sales, garage sales, car washes; and
(e) miscellaneous activities unique to individual clubs: initiation of new members, auctions, serving a banquet, and mock judging.

Following are examples of participant responses which illustrated the theme of trips and tours:

"We usually do a lot of community service. We always plant flowers out at the fair. Its a drag, there is nobody out there and its not fun, but then other years we just goof off and get in a water fight when we are done and then its fun......past few years we've tried to do more tours, like this year we went through Donatos and toured King's Bakery one year. Just little things that don't necessarily have to do with 4-H, but its just a good way to see things you wouldn't normally be exposed to and meet a lot of people."

"We [referring to 4-H club] are going to Cedar Point on the 18th. We always do something big each year. We went horseback riding one year, canoeing and stuff."

"Something our club is going to do is take a hike in a forest, well not really a forest, but in the mountains."

"...our club just went down to Kentucky for the Rolex and it was cool. Our club paid for it. We don't have a very big club so it was pretty good."

"The Urbana rabbit clinic, that's one thing my club looks forward to."

"We went to a play a month ago and it was kind of cool."

"Our group usually takes a canoe trip."

Typical responses related to community service were:

"Like on Daffodil days maybe only half our club showed up to do it...and it was fun like after we got into it, and people actually started coming up and wanting to buy daffodils it was fun, but at the beginning it wasn't fun.

"My club like when there are soldiers, and there was a war, we used to write letters to the soldiers to make them feel better." "Our club is going to do that this year, write to the ones in Bosnia."
"Usually we do the sucker days and daffodil days for the American Cancer Society and stuff. We have a lot of fun doing it. Just love going it I guess because we all get out and get a little bit of sunshine and help people that are in need.

"Our club goes to a nursing home and they play bingo and we give them prizes and stuff. We get them like soft candy and stuff. We go and visit them and they really enjoy that."

Participants comments which pertained to club parties were characterized by examples such as:

"A few years ago our club had like a really big party, a bon fire and all that and we had a swimming party where it was at one of the people's houses and they took us on a hay ride. It was really fun.

"We went on a pumpkin farm and we got to pick pumpkins and we had a fire and told stories."

"At our next meeting we're going to have a birthday party for all the club members and we're going to bring presents and exchange them."

Examples of participants comments which related to fund raising were as follows:

"I like some of the fund raisers we did because it kind of taught the group how to work as a group like at car washes."

"I like it when your club does stuff like my old club in Richwood every year they went to Urbana and they did a couple of fund raisers every year and we went to Cedar Point one year."

"I know we had like had to sell brownies one year to raise money and it wasn't fun. But then we raised money so we could go roller skating and that was fun."

"We did that last year [car wash] and we had a lot of people come through. We just took donation through."

"Another fun thing is we go to Walmart and we have a bake sale, that's pretty fun. We all get to make stuff and bring it in."
Some participants shared club activities that were unique to their club. Examples of these types of responses were as follows:

"Last year we had a group auction just as a club and we made a lot of money off of it, and we have a lot of fun this year going bowling and we've been some other places."

"We've had a couple of really nice clinics offered, like a judge who would come in and do a what I'm looking for in a western horse and what I'm looking for in an English horse. And sometimes there would be like a training clinic that if you have a green horse you could do that and those are always very helpful."

"Our club has like clover bucks and we collect them for like coming to the meetings and stuff like that, and at the end of the year we always auction them off for things."

"One thing our group has is mock judging....it used to be that everyone had to have their projects done, and you would go and your advisors would tell you, Oh maybe you could fix this, and it would help you. It would become like a pre-judging and it used to help me a lot."

The only county level activity mentioned with frequency was 4-H camp. It was a consensus among several groups that "everybody likes camp". The only other county-level activities mentioned, though not frequently were: Lollipop Day and project clinics. The fairs were not discussed in response to this question, probably because participants tended to think of club-based activities when they heard this question.

**Question 4: How do you choose which projects to take?**

Across all age groups, participants reported choosing their projects based on their own interests. A common practice described was to look through "the book," referring to the 4-H Family Guide publication, and find projects which looked interesting.
The factors which influenced project selection included:

(a) personal interest,

(b) recommendations from friends, parents, and other members,

(c) personal needs or "doing it anyway",

(d) desire for something new, a challenge, and

(e) limits of resources, specifically time and facilities for project work.

Characteristic comments in which participants described how they made project selection choices based on personal interests were as follows:

"I just take it year by year. If there is something when I get the book (referring to Family Guide), if there is something when I look through it and something catches your eye, I'll take it."

"I take hogs. I just like hogs and they are kind of easy to take care of." "Yeah, and you can get some money off them."

"I picked mine because I have horses and I've just always been interested in horses. I just like them."

Examples of comments in which participants reported relying on recommendations from others for project selection were as follows:

"Some you've already did and you know you like, others you talk to friends and they did them and liked them and you thought you might want to give it a try. Some you just look neat in the book and so you want to know."

"If you listen at the fair like what projects people have taken, you'll hear comments like oh this project was really easy, its neat to take. Or this project is too hard, it takes too much time. You can kind of figure out which projects are good."

"I choose mine because I asked my friends what they like to do and a lot of them said sewing, so I took sewing."
Typical comments from participants describing project selection based on personal needs or the reasoning that they would do this type of activity anyway were as follows:

"A lot of times I make my choices by what I need that year, especially sewing. This year my sister got married so I knew that I had the dresses that I had to make for bridesmaids so I took two of those and just take my projects by what I need. I am making a cedar chest for my sister as a wedding gift, and I am taking woodworking."

"I picked the special interest projects. It really gives you a lot of variety to choose from, and I usually don't take anything but Market Lamb I or II, etc., but I like to fish a lot, hunt a lot. It really wasn't a big deal, I fish anyway. I would fish and take pictures of everything and explained what I did, showed how to run the lures to the water and that kind of thing."

"I thought the funnest thing was the children part [referring to child care 4-H project] because it was just like baby sitting and I had my nieces and nephews and we just played games and stuff and that keeps them occupied and just take notes on it and stuff. You can have fun at the same time, so I liked that.

An example of typical comments regarding a limit of resources, such as time, were as follows:

"I just try to fit as many things into my schedule what I can that I like to do. This year I might not have a whole lot of time. I have so much to do this summer."

Some participants responded that the desire for something new or a challenge was the basis for their project selection choices:

"I decided because I wanted to try something new than I had in past years. Instead of pigs, I will try goats this year. So I decided to try something new."

All age groups of participants reported that their parents did not exert strong influence on their project choices. Participants said that their parents often made suggestions or gave advice, but ultimately, the choice of project(s) was up to them. Some
participants felt that their parents had expectations that they would continue with a chosen project and would be disappointed if they did not. In a few cases participants said that their parents set limits in terms of the number of projects they could take, due to overall family and child time commitments. The most typical answer to this question was "they [referring to parents] might make suggestions, but in the end its up to me to decide."

Parental expectations often seemed to be linked to livestock projects as the comments below demonstrate:

"It depends on what project you are talking about. My lambs, I mean if I don't take them, God help me. They influence that one because my dad is really into the sheep thing and we own flocks and stuff. But really anything else is up to me."

"My dad...he influences me to take hogs because we have a great hog business and everything. He likes me to take them, but if I don't want to, it's not a big deal. He thinks its good. But when I wanted to, my dad was so happy."

"Since we raise a lot of rabbit, I kind of have to take rabbits and each year." Q: Who Says? "My dad. And each year I just go like a step further. I'd like to take a horse, but we don't have a place to keep one."

"My dad loves to help me and my brother with the animals. He took cows when he was little, and he took pigs, so he know a lot about it and so he really helps us a lot."

**Question 5: If your parent reminded you this morning that you had a 4-H club meeting tonight, what would be your reaction?**

The response to this question could be summarized as an awareness of responsibility. Instead of reacting to the idea of going to a 4-H meeting, participants' first response to this question, across all groups was something like this:

"Am I prepared?"
"Is it my turn to do something?"

"Do I have my (minutes, treasurer's report, etc.) ready?"

After this universal initial reaction, the other type of common response was an initial reluctance to go, or annoyance to have to cancel other plans.

Characteristic responses related to awareness of responsibilities included:

"Am I prepared because I am the secretary? If I'm not ready that's trouble. You have to keep things going and I make sure I'm always ready."

"I'd probably be running around saying 'oh shoot, I have to do something.'"

"Oh crap, I needed to get something together."

"Oh shoot, I've got to get my health and safety report done."

Examples of comments in which participants referred to their reluctance to go to meetings or annoyance at having to cancel other plans for 4-H included:

"I'd wonder if I had anything else that night like if I was supposed to baby sit. Most of the time if I have to baby sit and I have a 4-H meeting then I have to take them with me and it is kind of hard to do that."

"I'd wonder if I had anything else I was supposed to do and hope I hadn't planned anything else to do."

"Do I really have to go?"

"I'd say 'oh no' because you don't want to have them [referring to meetings] because sometimes they are really boring, but then when you get there and it starts to get fun, then it is okay."

"Cancel the rest of the stuff I had going on that night."
Question 6: If your club were going to give an award to everyone who had completed (a certain number) of years of membership, and you were to receive this award, what do you think would be a neat thing to receive for this recognition?

The theme of these responses was that the award should be something of keepsake value, something which could be shown to friends and family with pride. Specific types of awards mentioned included: plaques, trophies, jackets, pins, medals, shirt, clover, ribbons, director's chairs, and money.

When asked whether they would prefer a trophy or similar item, or cash of the same value, ten of the eleven groups came to the quick consensus that they would prefer the trophy or other award versus cash. They were given the example that if a trophy cost $15.00 or $20.00, would be they prefer to have the trophy or the $20.00? Typical comments were as follows:

"Most people probably go out and spend it, like a plaque you'll have forever"

"The money, you can't treasure that"

"It's knowing that you've done something, you can always look back on it and tell your kids or grandkids"

"A plaque proves something more than what money would. If you show someone 20.00 bucks and say, I completed seven year of 4-H for it? For $20.00?, but if you show them a plaque, they'll know."

"You get your $20.00 and the next thing you know its gone but the trophy you will have that for a long time."

"You can buy a lot with $20.00, but I think I'd take the trophy."

"I would take the trophy. When my father was in 4-H he got so many trophies that my grandmother and grandfather have them around their living room on shelves and it is nice to see what he did in 4-H."
"I would probably take the trophy because when people come in the house they'd see it and say what's this for and I could say this is what I accomplished through 4-H when I was younger."

"I think the coat is a neat idea because trophies they just sit there and collect dust mostly. They are neat to look at but they just sit there."

"The item because... I mean I'd like the money but whenever you saw the item you'd think of what it meant."

"I won kind of a lot of awards to do with sheep and I would rather have the trophy and plaques than the money because with this stuff and I've almost set a record. I'm real proud of that and those things, to me are priceless. I would rather have that than $20.00."

"I would choose the cash because I don't get an allowance or anything. I do a lot of babysitting and I work hard for what money I do have, and a lot of my money goes in the bank and I have enough for my toe shoes because I'm a dancer and it would be really cool for me to have that $20.00 because I did well I got my pair of toe shoes."

"The $15.00 you would just go out and spend on junk. The plaque you'd actually have something to keep."

"The plaque could remind you of what you did and when you grow up it would be there to remind you of what it was like."

When asked whether they preferred merchandise awards such as sewing shears, animal grooming supplies, feed supplies, etc. as awards, the response was mixed. Some respondents felt this was a practical and possibly useful idea. Others did not like the idea, commenting that they might already own those items, or, would prefer to receive the cash award to purchase things of their own choosing. Example comments included:

"Like with sewing awards, a seam ripper and scissors I got. I got scissors for the seamstress of the year. It has been very useful and it is something I will remember and it is something of a higher quality than I had."

"I got something like that [referring to measuring cup for cooking] and I didn't like it."
Two ideas related to awards which surfaced were that ribbons, and to a lesser degree other awards, were frequently saved for a long period of time as keepsakes of a 4-H career. Secondly, while they themselves may not value participation ribbons as they grew older, participants saw participation ribbons as important for building confidence in younger members. Examples of responses in which participants described saving awards as mementos included:

"I have a big box full." [referring to ribbons saved]

"Yeah, I have about 30 of them." [referring to ribbons]

"I like that idea because I save all my ribbons since I was really little. We have a big box where we put everything we've ever gotten. I think it is fun to go back and look at all that stuff and remember what you did."

"I still have all my ribbons hanging up in my room, every plaque I've ever gotten through school, parades, whatever, it is all hanging up in my room and I am losing wall space, but I like having it there."

"There was one girl that made a blanket of all her ribbons so she is going to do the same thing for me."

"I just have a little folder with all the certificates that you get after every year. I figured I'd keep them until I have children and I can show them what I have done throughout my life. If they ever want to join 4-H it would give them something to aim for."

Typical comments from participants related to the value of participation awards were as follows:

"Because the kids maybe don't place or something, and like, well gee, some of them think, oh gee, I got a ribbon, this is great."

"yeah, [participation ribbons] builds up confidence and stuff"
"The older members, I don't think they think too much of it. I think the young kids, like the first and second year members, I think that helps their confidence a lot, knowing they're going to get something, no matter what".

"A lot of kids run up to their parent and say, Oh my gosh, look at this, look at what I got. They are really excited about it. [referring to club achievement awards]."

Question 7: If a $100.00 cash award were offered as the prize for some sort of 4-H contest, would the award motivate you to participate?

Across all age groups the response to this question was the same: a monetary award was not an incentive to participate in a contest or activity. Participants commented that they would enter only if they were interested anyway or thought they could do well at the particular type of contest offered. In the same vein, others said it would depend on the topic. Again, if it interested them, they might participate.

Sample comments included:

"Depends on how long it had to be."  "And what you had to do."  "It's got to be something you really want to do."

"I'd look into it but like she said, if I didn't know anything about it, then I wouldn't do it."

"I think if it was something you were already interested in and if you are being offered money for it, you might as well go for it, but if it isn't and you are not interested in then I'd wouldn't probably do it, because that's just wasting your time."

"It depends on what the contest was. If it was something really boring then no. $100.00 isn't enough to get me to do that boring thing."

"For a speaking contest, I would probably do it anyway, but poster contest that doesn't sound any fun to me."
"In general I already participate in all the things I would like to do and I don't do it to get the awards. I do it because it is something I enjoy and something I feel is worthwhile to get better at."

"Maybe because I'd have to see what the project was and then if it kind of interested me the money would interest me a little bit more."

"It depends if you'd like it or not. If it is something you'd want to do and just don't think about the money when you are doing it."

"I don't care about what you get, its just the fun of actually doing it, and the fun of competition and learning about stuff for the future."

Question 8: What is the best award you've received thus far in 4-H?

The following types of awards were identified by participants as the best award they had received thus far in their 4-H career: trophies and ribbons, representative to state fair and state fair awards, money in various forms, camp awards, and some miscellaneous items. Examples of participants’ responses were as follows:

"Reserve champion with hogs. I would have liked to be Grand Champion. That, I think shows me that I am good at showing my hog to the judge, that and also the inner circle award at 4-H camp because that shows that your peers accept you."

"I liked getting the Outstanding of the Day at state fair. It was a really good achievement to know that out of all the 88 counties of the ones that were there that day that you were picked to receive something. I guess just out of Ohio it seems different that they would call your name, you know what I mean, it was kind of a big accomplishment."

"A ribbon from that State Fair that says you participated."

"A few years ago I got a plaque that showed I participated in the versatility horse show. It is a really hard class to compete in and it was neat."

"I had a ribbon from last year- I took a rabbit. It was a 5th place but that is the first livestock I've taken."

"Money...for selling pigs."
The most significant thing about the responses to this question were that almost all of the awards mentioned were not 4-H awards, but were actually Jr. Fair awards, either at the county or state level. At no time in any of the group discussions did any of the participants acknowledge that they were aware that these types of awards were not 4-H awards.

**Question 9: Who is in charge of your 4-H club?**

There were two predominant responses to this question. The first common response was that the advisors were in charge. Other participants felt that members of their club shared the leadership and that the members themselves were ultimately responsible for making decisions. They reported that it was typical for everyone to discuss an idea and vote on it. Other participants responded that this also happened in their clubs but that they felt the advisors always had the final say and therefore they felt the advisor(s) were in charge.

Characteristic comments related to advisor(s) being in charge included:

"I think our advisors are pretty much in charge, and then the president usually takes over and runs the meetings, but the advisors have a lot to say in what we do and activities."

"They [referring to advisors] really control the meetings like what's said and what's done during the meeting and the president just says like old business and stuff like that"

"I was in a club that the officers did everything and the advisors. It would be like raise your hand. If you don't want to do it, they think of something else and you really didn't have a say in much unless you were an officer."
"In our club it's exactly the opposite, [responding to previous comment] because we have so many young kids and our advisors just take over. Our officers are older members, but we just sit there behind the table and look pretty, I think. I mean, they [the advisors] just take over."

"I guess a lot of parents feel like they want to take control of everything. But, I would like it if the kids got to take control of the meetings, because that is the part that keeps coming up about responsibility and everything like that."

"I'm the president but the advisor helps and they have the last say on everything....not on everything but on some stuff."

Typical comments related to members being in charge of their club included the following:

"Our club the kids mainly do everything and then if we have any questions we ask the advisors. If we are stuck on something we'll ask, or if the advisors have something important to talk about they will talk about that, but the kids mainly run it. We come up with ideas, but if we get stuck or something we'll ask."

"At the beginning of the year, we had our meeting and we stressed between the advisors and the girls that the advisors were there just to advise and that it was to be run by the girls...our advisor will like gather information for us and stuff, but its mainly us running everything."

"If we need help on like arranging a time or date our advisor will help us with that, but we usually are the ones that decide where we go."

"Our members are in charge and we talk about everything but our advisors and our parents are really involved and they always find out things for us to help us. Like how are interviews are this year we have to go to these different stations so we are going to get a packet to help us so we can learn all the things so we'll know what to do to answer the questions."

"The members. Our advisors continually say whatever you want is what we'll do."
Question 10: What are the benefits of being in 4-H?

Responses to this question can be summarized into three groups as follows:

(a) learning things,
(b) meeting people and making friends, and
(c) earning money.

The most common benefit mentioned by participants was related to learning. Examples mentioned included project skills such as cooking, responsibility, public speaking, self discipline/confidence/esteem, pride, discovery of own talents, knowledge about animals, patience, decision making, study skills, and learning to work with people. This matched the response to the first focus group question concerning what members liked best about 4-H. Although these questions were not designed to overlap, the responses provided evidence that learning serves as both an incentive to participate and a benefit resulting from participation. Included below are responses related to learning things as being a benefit of participation in 4-H.

"I don't know if this is really a benefit or not, but when you're interviewed after your project, you don't know something, and you tell them you don't know it, you say the wrong thing, it's really nice when they tell you what is correct you an you just like, okay, I'll remember that because usually some of the same questions come up year after year and its always like well gee I missed that one last year, but I go it right this year. and that helps you to understand."

"It teaches you a lot of self discipline because you have to work the animal and stuff like that"

"Just the decisions that you have to make that goes through life, if you want to go somewhere but you have animals and should I go, like a couple of days or should I talk my parents into doing it or should I stay and watch my animals myself?"
"Learning about yourself. A lot of opportunities to do a lot of different things and you learn what you like and what you don't like."

"It's like hands-on"

"It's not like you have to do it. You are doing it willingly unlike school where you have to do it, you want to or not."

"It teaches you self discipline. It makes you work harder and try to do good."

"I've learned valuable lessons about being responsible because this year my sister, she is 18, but... she did not have time to be in the club this year so I got to be secretary and it's been a lot of hard work and a lot of good practice for me because I have to be thinking ahead and planning ahead."

"It teaches you responsibility. If you don't finish a project or you don't feed the animals they might die. If you don't manage your project, you might not get a reward or anything."

"Learning how to cook. "Learned woodworking." "Learn parts of a hog."

Examples of comments related to meeting people and making friends as a benefit of 4-H participation were:

"There are so many opportunities with 4-H and you just make so many friends. I can't imagine not being in 4-H. Just the people you meet basically. You learn how to work with people. There are so many benefits."

"Like a couple of my best friends I met at 4-H camp or the fair or something and I'm best friends with them now. It's been really beneficial."

Typical comments which described making money as a benefit of 4-H participation were as follows:

"The demonstrations I do that helps me when I have to get up in front of my class. It makes it easier. And the sale when I have to sell my animals, that money that I get for that it goes towards my college so it helps me out there."
"The Money." Q: Tell me a little more about that, where do you get money? "Like from your A's and stuff from the projects." "Also if you sell your animal. It depends on how high it goes, you get money from it." "That's neat because if you sell it, and the buyer pays so much, you get so much money and its cool."

"Money...from selling your lamb and doing a good show."

Q: How would you feel if someone said you couldn't be in 4-H anymore? "I'd be sad." Q: What would you miss about it? "I'd would miss the money." Q: How much money do you usually make? "$400.00-500.00. Q: What do you do with your money? "Put it in the bank for college."

Question 11: What do you look forward to doing that you have not yet done in 4-H?

The responses to this question were of two general categories: serving in a leadership role, and participation in a specific activity. Some examples of the kinds of responses given in each category are as follows:

(a) Serving in a leadership role: being a camp counselor, Jr. Fair Board member, club officer, advisor, teaching younger members; and

(b) Participation in specific activities: going to camp, Performance Against Standards horse show, barrel racing, skill-a-thons, club activities, doing a new project.

Some examples of participant responses about participation in activities were as follows:

"I'm going to camp this year for the first time."

"I'm trying to go to state fair from the point shows."

"The thing with the skill-a-thon is different this year. I think it is going to be neat to see what that's like and I think it is going to be better than the interviews."

"I want to convince my mom to let me take sewing and cooking next year."
"I'm trying out for Equestrian Princess this year ... that is something that I have been looking forward to since my sister did it because she had a lot of fun. My club is thinking about taking a trip to the Kentucky Horse park and that is something I'm looking forward to."

"I'd like to go on an exchange trip. I just like going to different places."

Characteristic comments about serving in a leadership role were as follows:

"I'd like to just try being an advisor. My mom comes home and she is talking about all this stuff that she needs to do and it sounds like fun."

"Probably to help out or be a junior leader and help leading the 4-H camps with their field trips and stuff and going to the State Fair."

"I'd like to be on the junior fair board. I think that would be cool."

"I think it would be fun to be a camp counselor."

Other Findings

Two additional topics were discussed by most, but not all, of the focus groups. These topics were: perception of advisors, and friend's ideas about 4-H. Although they were not part of the original questioning route, the moderator asked questions about these topics if they surfaced in the course of the discussion.

When participants discussed the positive and negative aspect of their adult advisor's leadership they were essentially positive. Many participants shared characteristics which they thought made their advisor a good club leader. The predominant characteristics which advisors were praised for included being helpful, getting information, being organized, and making everyone feel included. When the topic of advisor leadership was raised in the discussion, participants were asked by the moderator to rate their advisors on
a scale of 1-10, with 1 being poor and 10 being a great advisor, and to describe why they
gave the rating they did. Typical comments included:

"I'd rate mine a 10. They are good people. They really help you on....they help
you decide on what you should do and help you decide...they show you a lot of
things that you didn't know. they help you on your projects if you have a problem.
they help you a lot. they are great people. I've know them for awhile and they
know everybody, even the new kids in the group, they take individual time and
they help."

"I'd rate ours about a 9 or 10. they are really good. they encourage us a lot, They
don't do it for us. They give us things to go by but they encourage us to help each
other a lot because you learn so much from other kids. They are organized people
but they don't do it for us."

"I'd say 8 or 9. They are really organized and really nice. They always help us out
when we need help and if you can't make meetings every time it's okay, just go to
the next one."

"I'd rate mine about an 8. I know that no one is perfect and some times they give
bad advice. You think oh gosh why did they tell me to do that, but I think they
also help a lot getting information and some times the book doesn't tell everything
you need to know."

"I would give mine probably a 7 or an 8 because they always know what is going
on and tell us when stuff is due. they know what is going on."

I'd give my advisor a 10 because they always listen to you and they always bring
up stuff in the meeting and if you want information they get it for you by the next
meeting and they listen to everybody's suggestions. They try to make the meetings
as fun as possible."

"I would probably give mine a 7 or 8 because she listens to us and lets everyone
have their own talking time. I went to a 4-H meeting with one of my friends
because I was spending the night with her, and their 4-H advisor I'd rate about a 2
because they had like a 5 minute meeting. They went over how much money they
had and stuff and then the president said who want to play heads up 7 up or
something like that and the 4-H advisor just went along with that. I think they
needed to spend more time on their meeting."
The second topic which was discussed by most of the focus groups was their friends' ideas about 4-H. Participants discussed whether their friends thought it was "cool" to be in 4-H. Reaction to this idea was mixed; participants thought some of their friends would say 'yes,' some 'no'. The common theme which came out of this discussion, however, was that participants felt their peers were not knowledgeable about 4-H, and that they often have an inaccurate farm image of 4-H. A typical comment to which there was much agreement said that peers did not know what they were missing because they did not really understand 4-H. Comments related to friends having a farm image of 4-H included the following:

"yeah, most people think 4-H members live on farms or have more land and stuff."

"I can honestly say, when I was younger we lived in Hilliard, suburbia right there. It was like 4-H was foreign. I never heard of it until we moved out to Union county. Never knew it existed, and then its come out here and they are asking me to join them. Like right!, That's the way I saw it then, its a farm thing, you know. I have been in for 8 years now, and I am very happy. I mean, I think its one of those things that if you aren't in it, I guess you don't really know what you are missing. We know what they are missing out on, they have no clue."

"Mine are kind of split [referring to friends]. Most of the people live in town, so they are not that exposed to it and they wouldn't really have an opinion one way or the other (about 4-H). I'm sure you would have some people that you are all nerds or you are all farmers, that typed of thing. but there are some people that are in it, so they feel like....I guess once you are in it people usually like it, but if not there probably are stereotypes."

Characteristic comments from participants about their peers lack of knowledgeable about 4-H included the following:

"I guess one of the biggest things, you know these kids in 8th grade last year, there was one kid that made the comment, you ought to feel very dumb, you are in 4-H and 4-H doesn't matter any more, all we are interested in is the rides at the fair."
"I think the kids that aren't in 4-H club don't understand it, because I'll go to prom and I will wear a dress that I've made and it will be like 'you made your own dress?' and they are just completely shock and there like 'why?' and I say well it was 4-H. And their like 'you do that in the?'. . . . just typical things they take for granted that they don't know unless we tell them."

"Well I think that, I really don't know what they think because I'm one of their friends and I don't really think they'd talk down 4-H, at least around me."

"Some of them (referring to friends) are in it and others aren't in it but show steers. some of them like it and most of them don't even know about it."

"Some on my friends that aren't in it, if you tell them about it, since they are not in it they will like laugh at you because you are in it, but then when they actually see you at the fair having fun they are kind of jealous of you."

A secondary theme which was evident throughout the discussions was the notion of participants feeling pressured for time for 4-H and other activities. This idea surfaced at many points in the discussions. For example, time pressures affected participation in and planning of activities ("everyone's so busy"), attitudes toward going to meetings, and selection of projects. Examples of comments related to participation in and planning of activities included:

"We used to have a cookout every year and we got our awards then but the last few years we haven't done it."

"I was disappointed that I didn't go to 4-H camp last year. I'm not going this year either because my summer is getting so full....I always wanted to do that. I didn't go last year because I had to go to football camp."

"This is my first year on Jr. Fair Board, and its certainly going to be interesting, because I have to take care of my sheep. I don't know if the fair and the coaches for football work together or not, but it's always right in the middle and always the same week as the football camp....I don't know what I'm doing. But I am going to be running back and forth from football to 4-H."
"...different 4-H days at like Kings Island and Cedar Point, I think they should be like later in the year like in the summer, they are all in June, with camp and getting out of school, some times it is really busy. We were pretty lucky we got to go last year. It was the only time we’d ever gone because we were always too busy."

Typical responses related to attitude toward meetings were:

"some nights if it's a busy night then I dread going [referring to club meetings] because I have like so much homework and stuff."

"Sometimes I am upset because my meetings are normally on Monday night and Monday night I have to do a bunch of chores and take out the garbage, so I am normally like out of time."

"Sometimes it is bad because on Tuesday after school I have baseball practice and piano lessons and then a 4-H meeting because our 4-H meetings are always on Tuesday."

A characteristic comment related to the selection of projects included:

"I think that something that is hard to do is to get your project done and coordinate them with summer vacation. That is why I don't take very many project, because I have so many things to do. That is why I am only taking two or three projects this year, so that I will have time to do them in July before the fair."

**Objective 3: To Determine Whether Perceptions about the 4-H Program Differed with Age of Participant.**

The focus group interviews conducted in this research were organized into three age groups: 10-11 year olds, 12-13 year olds, and 14-18 years olds. There was only one finding which was unique to the 14-18 year old focus groups. This issue surfaced, not in response to a moderator's question, but through the discussion among participants of various questions. The high school age participants expressed frustration that 4-H
sometimes felt as though it was focused toward younger members. The following quotes expressed the feelings of some of the 14-18 year olds about their club meeting experience:

"Our group has a lot of young kids, a lot of first year kids, and it is hard for us to get around and do group activities. You can tell these kids, okay, we planned this, we are going to do this, and they are going to forget to tell their parents. They are going to forget to do this and that and they are going to just totally forget about it, and it is hard that way for us to do group activities because of that...."

"The younger members in our group just want to sit on the floor and talk, and that is what the officers get to do is tell them to be quiet. That's our job. That's all we do while the advisors are going on."

"I think that the way 4-H is organized, a lot of it is geared toward younger starting members, It has been really hard for me. This is my first year and I am a junior in high school. It's like nothing is open to you. There is a lot of stuff that is closed to you because you are older. If I were to go to 4-H camp I couldn't be a counselor, and I couldn't be with my friends...."

"Have partner clubs...have meetings together, but there are still two separate clubs....do community service activities together and that way the younger kids can see what is going on. I don't know how you would work this out, but that way one club doesn't feel like they are going to be baby sitting when they go on trips and things."

Objective 4: To Pilot a Process for Gathering Input from Community Club Members Which May Be Applicable To Other County 4-H Programs

The following findings relate to the process of utilizing focus groups with youth as a program development tool for 4-H programs. These findings were categorized as follows: youth as a target audience, focus groups with youth as compared to adults, management and implementation of focus groups within the 4-H program, the role of the moderator, and the use of tokens of appreciation.
4-H Youth as a Target Audience

This study found that youth were very willing to participate in focus group interviews. Those who were invited but did not participate did so only because of schedule conflicts such as family vacations or other activities. The only concern expressed by youth in the invitation process was a desire to know who else would be involved, meaning other participants. Some invitees specifically asked whether they would know anyone else in the focus group. They wanted an assurance that they would not be among strangers. Some parents commented to the researcher when they brought their children to the interviews that their child was eager to participate, and that their only hesitancy was due to wanting to know who else would be participating along with them.

The age groupings used for this study seemed natural and comfortable to the participants. The age ranges and mix of genders within each group did not detract in any way from the participants' willingness to offer opinions and discuss topics. All age groups included in this study were found to be quite capable of expressing their personal experiences and understanding and discussing questions involving hypothetical situations.

Focus Groups with Youth as Compared to Adults

Only two major differences were noted in this study when comparing the process of a youth focus group with that of a typical adult focus group interview. These comparisons were based on the experience of the researcher in conducting adult focus groups with numerous other audiences. First, the youth in this study tended not to elaborate at any length as they answered questions. Their answers tended to be short and to the point, whereas adults may elaborate a great deal in an effort to explain their response. In this
study, youth stayed focused on the questions asked by the moderator and did not stray into topics which were not part of the interview. Because youth participants gave short answers, it was found that a larger number of questions could be asked of a youth focus group than could typically be covered by an adult group. After conducting the initial focus group of this study, the researcher added the additional questions which had been asked of the first group, to the questioning route for use with all additional groups.

Second, some youth had a tendency to interact with the moderator as they would with a teacher or other authority figure. Examples of this behavior included waiting to be called on before responding, raising a hand to be recognized before speaking, and looking to the moderator for some sign of approval of their response, as if giving answers in a classroom situation.

Another behavior which was noted in some of the groups conducted in this study was that youth tended to follow the same order of participant responses throughout the interview. In the first questions, the moderator asked each participant to respond in the order they were seated around the room, and then after the first question they were told they were free to respond whenever they had a comment. Some groups continued to respond by going around the room in the same order, and waited for each participant to respond in turn.

Management and Implementation of a Focus Group Process Within a County 4-H Youth Development Program

Focus groups were found to be an effective data collection technique for gathering youth input on a broad range of programming topics. This study chose to ask questions
on a broad range of program topics because there was no previous information available from youth on these topics. High quality data was gathered from a cross section of youth representing all geographical areas of the county, in addition to representing the age span and gender mix of the target audience.

The single most challenging aspect of implementing this process was the time necessary to invite youth to participate. Personal phone calls were used to invite youth to participate in this study. This method was found to be efficient because in most cases an immediate response was received as to whether the youth could or wanted to participate. It was the opinion of the researcher that telephone invitations garnered more positive responses than would have been received by mail because questions the potential participants had were answered immediately over the telephone. Approximately 50 hours were devoted to extending invitations by telephone. An additional benefit of telephone invitations found to be true for youth participants was that the short length of time between the invitation and the actual interview kept the commitment to participate from being forgotten.

In the experience of this researcher, the other management tasks related to organizing and implementing focus groups could be handled within the scope of daily youth program management. For example, confirmation letters can be printed in advance and ready to mail as acceptances to participate are received. Reminder calls can be made during normal business hours by leaving messages on answering machines at many households.

The timing and scheduling utilized for this study were found to be workable for both the 4-H program and participants. The focus groups were held during the last week of
May and the first three weeks of June, with most being held during the first 10 days of June. For most participants, this coincided with their last days of school. For the Union County 4-H program, this time of year ranged from early to about the middle of the club meeting year for most of the members in the county.

The researcher planned for each group interview to last approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. This was found to be an appropriate length for youth focus groups. Some groups could have continued their discussion for a longer period of time, but all topics of interest were able to be covered in this time frame.

**Role of Moderator**

The researcher, who was also a 4-H professional in the Union County 4-H program, served as the moderator for ten of the eleven groups conducted in this study. It appeared to the researcher that this posed no problem for the participants in this study. It is the opinion of the researcher that participants felt it was natural for someone involved with 4-H to be interested in their opinions about 4-H. The researcher observed no hesitation on the part of participants to express positive or negative comments about 4-H in the presence of the 4-H professional serving as moderator. One focus group was moderated by a 4-H professional from another county which was not known to any of the participants. There were no apparent differences between the information collected from this focus group and the others which were moderated by the researcher.

**Tokens of Appreciation**

While it was not a major emphasis of this study, 4-H members were offered a token of appreciation as an expression of thanks for their participation in this study. Participants
were offered a choice of several 4-H imprinted items. Items they chose from included: pencils in the shape of the 4-H clover, 4-H calculator, 4-H motto mugs, 4-H mini- footballs, 4-H frisbees, and 4-H key chains. Little feedback was received regarding the token because participants selected them as they were leaving the focus group interview.

It was found that the most preferred item was the 4-H motto mug, a brown and green ceramic mug with the 4-H pledge and motto imprinted on it. This item was so much more popular than the other tokens offered that the researcher returned most of the other items and purchased more mugs as the focus groups progressed. Key chains were the second most popular item chosen by focus group participants. It was the opinion of the researcher that none of the participants expected to receive any kind of token, payment, or other compensation for their participation.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The mission of the Ohio 4-H Youth Development program has been to develop youth to reach their fullest potential as capable, competent, caring, and contributing citizens (Ohio State University Extension, 1995A). The active involvement of youth as equal partners in defining, developing, implementing and continually improving the 4-H program is a part of the current Ohio 4-H strategic plan. A review of 4-H and related youth development literature found that there were very few examples of situations in which youth opinions were sought for 4-H program development purposes.

This study sought to address the lack of input into program development by youth participants of the 4-H program. This was a significant problem because the Extension system is purported to be a client need-based organization, yet no avenues seemed to exist for gathering input from a predominant client group: youth ages 10-18.

This study sought input from youth that could be immediately utilized for program development and improvement purposes. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Union County community club members about the Union County 4-H program. The objectives of the study were to describe the members who participated in
the study on the characteristics of age, ethnicity, gender, and length of membership, to
determine their perceptions about the 4-H program, to determine whether their
perceptions differed based on age, and to test this process of gathering youth input for
possible use by other county 4-H programs.

The target population for this study were all youth age 10-18 who were enrolled as
community club members in the Union County 4-H program. There were 953 youth in the
target population. A stratified random sample of seventy-seven youth were invited to
participate in the study.

Focus group interviews were chosen as the data collection method because they
allowed the researcher to gain an in depth understanding of the participants' perceptions
and experiences. Focus group methodology met other criteria such as easily spanning age
and reading level abilities, and being interesting enough to attract the participation of the
desired population. Eleven focus groups, divided into three age groups, were conducted
in May and June of 1996. A total of seventy-seven youth participated in the focus groups.

To gain insight into their perceptions of the 4-H program, 4-H members were asked
questions about the following aspects of the 4-H program: what they liked best about 4-H,
what changes they would like to make in 4-H, what they thought about the activities and
events offered, how they choose their projects and what they thought about project
offerings, their reaction to a reminder about a club meeting, their preferences regarding
awards, whether a cash award would motivate them to participate in a contest, what was
the best award they had received, who was in charge of their 4-H club, what were the
benefits of participating in 4-H and what they looked forward to concerning 4-H participation.

Each focus group was audio-recorded and written notes were also recorded by an assistant moderator in each group. Each audio recording was transcribed into written form. These transcriptions, along with the assistant moderator's notes, and the researchers field notes, comprised the data set for this study.

The transcriptions of the audio recordings were coded using key words and phrases which summarized the data from each interview. Summaries were then compared within each age group for similarities and differences. After a summary was developed for each age group, these were compared to discover similarities or differences across age groups.

The major findings of the study included the following: the aspects which members liked best about 4-H were also the same things which members saw as being the benefit of participating in 4-H. These included: learning and doing new things, meeting new friends and other people, working with animals and having fun. Overall, members were not able to think of changes they would recommend in the 4-H program. Changes which they did mention concerned the Jr. Fair activities rather than the 4-H program.

This study showed clearly that a member’s 4-H experiences were primarily defined by their individual club experiences. Few members identified with county level activities, with the exception of 4-H camp. Favorite club activities seemed to be those that meet the previously mentioned notions of learning and doing new things, and involvement with friends and other people. Examples of highly rated club activities include tours to a wide
variety of places and other group activities such as swimming parties, hay rides, car
washes, hiking, canoe trips, etc.

Participants reported choosing their 4-H projects on the basis of personal interests and
needs, and often reported using recommendations from others to decide about taking a
project. Other than offering suggestions and advice, members felt their parents did not
exert a great deal of influence on their project choice.

Key findings related to recognition of members included: members strongly prefer a
recognition item of keepsake or lasting value versus a cash award, and second, the
enticement of a cash award was definitely not a strong motivator encouraging
participation in an activity or contest.

About half of members viewed their adult advisor(s) as being in charge of their 4-H
club. The other half felt that the entire membership shared the leadership and decision
making for their club. When asked to rate their advisors, members were overwhelming
positive about their advisor(s).

Additional findings of this study included that many participants have the feeling of
being pressured for enough time to participate in 4-H activities. This was a recurring
theme throughout all of the group interviews. It was also found that members felt their
peers have an inaccurate image of 4-H as being for farm kids, and they perceive their peers
as not being knowledgeable about 4-H in general.

The only finding specific to an age group was found in the 14-18 year old groups. High
school age 4-H members expressed frustration that 4-H meetings and other activities
seemed focused toward younger members.
Conclusions

The following conclusions are based upon the findings of this study. These conclusions relate both to specific aspects of the 4-H program, and to the process of youth involvement in program development.

1. The 4-H activities described as both favorites and most beneficial by 4-H members are favored because they meet their criteria of: potential for learning and doing new things, socialization with friends and other people, involvement with animals, and opportunity to have fun. For example: fairs were mentioned as a favorite 4-H activity by participants because they can meet all of the above mentioned criteria.

2. Discovering potential program changes which would be supported by youth needs to be explored by methods other than open ended focus group questions. It is the opinion of this researcher that youth may have limited skill or practice in imagining alternative scenarios and therefore may find this type of question more challenging than others.

3. Knowledge of the interests of youth is fundamental to the 4-H curriculum development process because they base their project selection choices primarily on personal interests and needs.

4. The Union County 4-H program does not have a recognition program in place which is meaningful to 4-H members. This conclusion was based on the finding that the
recognition that has been provided for all members generated little to no discussion across all focus groups in this study. Second, among awards described by members as being the best they had received, most of the responses given were Jr. and/or State Fair related, rather than 4-H. Third, it was the experience of this researcher that the forms of recognition chosen by adult advisory groups for youth, were not the same as the youth included in this study would choose for themselves.

5. Cash awards are not an effective motivator toward youth participation within the Union County 4-H program.

6. There is a need within the Union County 4-H program for emphasis on the role of, and opportunities for teen members, distinct from that of younger members.

7. A significant area for improvement within the 4-H program at the club level is the transformation of leadership and decision making roles from being exclusively the responsibility of adult advisors to being shared or primarily the responsibility of youth members.

8. The findings of this study supported the conceptual model by demonstrating that youth can contribute to the program development process by providing their opinions about and attitudes toward 4-H programming.
9. The lack of youth participation in program development has not been due to a lack of willingness or skill on the part of youth, but rather a lack of effort on the part of the 4-H program to seek out and provide ways to engage youth in program development.

10. Planning and implementing a small number of focus groups (3 groups minimum) for purposes of gaining youth input for program development would be manageable within the parameters of a typical 4-H program. Conducting more than 4 groups would likely require the commitment of resources beyond the typical program management workload.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions of this study. These recommendations are categorized as follows: recommendations for theory, which are directed toward the theory of 4-H youth development, recommendations for practice, which may be utilized by 4-H youth development professionals, committees, and other youth development practitioners, and recommendations for further research, specifically in the area of 4-H youth development.

Recommendations for Theory:

A theory of youth development specific to the 4-H youth development program was not found to exist in literature or among 4-H professionals interviewed for purposes of this study. However, some basic tenets were reiterated by several 4-H professionals and 4-H literature which could form the basis for development of a theory of 4-H youth development. The three ideas expressed by 4-H professionals and 4-H literature which
may guide the practice of 4-H youth development were:

(a) the use of experiential learning,

(b) the use of adult volunteers as positive role models and guides for a child's development, and

(c) flexibility and extensive personal choice of subject matter and/or activities in which the youth may participate.

This researcher recommends that an additional tenet of emphasis on youth involvement in program development be added to the preceding three ideas, and that these basic principles be utilized to form a theory of 4-H youth development. Based on the findings and experience of this study, this researcher recommends that meaningful youth involvement in decision making processes which affect their choices and future, is not only appropriate but necessary in order to continue to engage youth in the 4-H organization.

Second, youth involvement in program development for 4-H supports the other tenets by

(a) giving youth an experiential learning experience as they help to plan and implement 4-H programs,

(b) bringing youth in close contact with adult role models as they work together in the program development process and,

(c) assuring broad and appealing choices of projects and other activities within the program by involving youth in the development of program offerings.

**Recommendations for Practice**

1. The 4-H program should develop additional opportunities for youth to be involved in developing and managing the 4-H program at the club, county, district, and state levels.
This study demonstrated that youth program development decisions may be made differently if the input of young people were included in the decision making process. Examples could include additional representation on advisory committees or formation of youth advisory groups to provide input for program development.

2. 4-H promotion and recruitment efforts should emphasize the things which most appeal to members: learning and doing new things, and the opportunity of meeting new people.

3. 4-H recruitment efforts should emphasize the non-farm aspect of most 4-H opportunities, as an inaccurate farm image of 4-H appears to be a widely held misconception among young people of 4-H membership age.

4. An analysis of typical project progression, and youth input as to their wants and needs, should be part of the curriculum design process conducted by any 4-H professionals involved in curriculum development. Young people should be involved in state level curriculum development committees to give input in the project selection and development processes.

5. There is a need for clear communication to 4-H members concerning the distinction between the Jr. Fair and 4-H programs. The primary benefit of this understanding would be that dissatisfactions on the part of members with Jr. Fair activities would be directed to the appropriate organization. This study demonstrated that many youth program changes
which members desired were directly related to Jr. Fairs and therefore not within the control of the 4-H program to change.

6. 4-H committees and professionals responsible for the selection of award items should take into consideration the keepsake value of the award, as this was the highest preference expressed by members toward awards.

7. The Union County 4-H program should involve youth in the development of a recognition system which would be meaningful to members of all ages and levels of participation.

8. The 4-H program should provide educational opportunities for adult volunteers on how to involve members in leadership and decision making roles within 4-H clubs and activities. The 4-H program should develop educational materials for adult volunteers which describe, in practical terms, the ideal roles of adults and youth within the 4-H club and other 4-H activities.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Additional research is needed to explore in greater depth many specific aspects of the 4-H program. Examples which were raised in this study which should be explored in more depth were:

(a) what types of roles/ opportunities would appeal to teen members?

(b) what type of meaningful recognition could be offered by the 4-H program?
(c) what would motivate youth toward participation in a specific activity?,

(d) what techniques used by adult volunteers are most effective at engaging young people in leadership roles within their club?, and

(e) how does a youths' interaction with adult volunteers enhance or hinder their 4-H youth development experience?

2. Further research is needed related to utilizing focus group methodology to explore possibilities such as:

(a) whether group interviews with intact groups of youth such as an existing club could yield high quality information for program development purposes,

(b) whether mixed age (9-18 years old) groups could be successful in discussing program development topics,

(c) whether repeated participation in focus group interviews by the same young person, over a period of time, would yield positive or negative results for program development purposes.

3. Research similar to this study is needed to gather input from youth across additional programming units. This information would allow comparisons for the discovery of issues common to a broader youth audience. If issues of wide concern are discovered, they could be addressed at a district or state 4-H level of programming.


Spethmann, B. (1992). Focus groups key to researching kids: These aren’t pint sized adults, so interaction counts as much as the question. *Advertising Age*, 63, s1-s24.


APPENDIX A

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARENTS
Dear

I am writing to let you know about a study I will be conducting to find out what members think about our 4-H program. This study will be done in collaboration with Dr. N. L. McCaslin and will involve focus group interviews with our 4-H members. The focus group interviews will be small group discussions with approximately 5-8 members per group. I will be conducting several groups with each of the following age groups: 10 & 11 year olds, 12 & 13 year olds, and 14-18 year olds.

I have randomly selected 120 4-Her's from our 1996 4-H enrollment list to invite to participate in these focus groups. I have selected your child, to invite to participate in a focus group interview. PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY OPTIONAL FOR YOUR CHILD.

I will be calling the week of May 27th to invite your child to participate in a focus group. I will briefly explain to them that we will discuss their views on the 4-H program and invite them to participate. If they are available at the scheduled interview time I will send them a letter confirming their participation in the group interview.

This is a group interview and participants will interact with each other and hear comments from everyone else in the group. Therefore, I cannot insure complete confidentiality. However, I will report all results on a group basis only. I will not at any time attach names to individual comments that are made during the interviews. I will be audio taping the discussion so that I accurately record all comments. I will be destroying the tapes and notes after this study is completed.
I will use the results of this study to plan future 4-H programs for the young people in Union county. I will also share the results with the 4-H Advisory Council and 4-H advisors for program planning purposes.

I will be offering a 4-H item as a token of appreciation to each member that participates in a focus group. I think they will find the experience fun and interesting.

It is fine if you would like to discuss this invitation with your child in advance of my call and help them decide if they would like to participate. If you have any questions about this study, feel free to call me at 644-8117 or 1-800-589-8584.

Sincerely,

Christy Leeds
Extension Agent, 4-H
Ohio State University Extension

Dr. N. L. McCaslin
Professor
Dept. of Agricultural Education
APPENDIX B

TELEPHONE INVITATION FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
TELEPHONE INVITATION FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Telephone invitation to youth ages 10-18, 2-3 weeks prior to scheduled focus group interview.

Hello, this is Christy Leeds from the Ohio State University Extension office. I am calling to invite you to participate in a study I am doing to find out what 4-H members think about the 4-H program. I have chosen you by random selection from all the 4-H members in Union county.

I will be conducting several group interviews to find out what members think about 4-H. The group interview will be a small group discussion with about 5-8 other 4-H members like yourself, giving their views about the 4-H program. Participating in this group interview is completely optional, you do not have to do it.

The focus group interview I would like to invite you to attend will be held: ___ Day/date/time ___. Would you like to participate?

If no: thank them for their time and proceed to next invitation.
If Yes: proceed as follows:

I am glad you will be able to participate. I will be sending you a confirmation letter giving you the time and place for the group interview.

If you change your mind about participating or have a conflict, my phone number will be on the confirmation letter, just call me and tell me you cannot attend. Thank you for agreeing to participate, I look forward to our interview.
APPENDIX C

CONFIRMATION LETTER TO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
Dear

I am pleased that you are interested in participating in a focus group interview to discuss your views on the 4-H program. I will be conducting this study in collaboration with Dr. N. L. McCaslin at the Ohio State University.

The group interview you have agreed to participate in will be held:

Date:  
Time:  
Location:

(The library meeting room is in a small white building attached to the library. You can enter through the library or directly from the street to the meeting room. I'll have a 4-H clover sign out).

Here are some details I want you to know about the focus group interview in which you will be participating:

There will be approximately 5-8 other 4-H members in this group discussion with you. You may know some of them, or they might all be new to you.

I will be tape recording the discussion. After I have listened to the tape to make an accurate summary of our discussion, I will destroy the tape. Your comments will be confidential. This means that I will not ever tell anyone which comments you made. I will share them only as a group summary of everyone's comments. I cannot insure complete confidentiality because this is a group interview, you will hear everyone else's comments and they will hear yours.

The Ohio State University, The United States Department of Agriculture, and Union County Commissioners Cooperating
It will be important for you to give your honest opinions about the 4-H program and your 4-H experiences. Your opinions may be different from someone else's, this is what I want to find out.

I will have a consent form for you to sign saying that you understand what this focus group is about and that you have voluntarily agreed to participate.

I will be offering you a 4-H item as a token of appreciation for taking time to participate in this focus group.

If you have a conflict or find you are unable to attend, call and let me know you. My phone numbers are: Home: 513-349-6852, Extension office 644-8117 or 1-800-589-8584.

Sincerely,

Christy Leeds
Extension Agent, 4-H
Ohio State University Extension

Dr. N. L. McCaslin
Professor
Dept. of Agricultural Education
APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONING ROUTE
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONING ROUTE

1. Take out the card that you wrote some notes on when we started. Please share the thoughts you wrote on your card in response to "What do you like best about 4-H?"

   (a) What in 4-H is most important to you?

2. What would you change about 4-H?

   (a) What other changes would you make?

3. What do you think about the activities and events that are offered in 4-H?

4. How do you choose which projects to take?
   (a) What do you think about the projects that are offered in 4-H?

5. If your parent reminded you this morning that you have a 4-H club meeting tonight, what would be your reaction?

6. What do you think is a really neat award for your 4-H club to give someone who has completed ___ years of 4-H membership?

7. If a $100.00 cash award were offered as the prize for some sort of 4-H contest, would the award motivate you to participate?

8. What is the best award you've received thus far in 4-H?

9. If I asked you who is in charge of your 4-H club, what would you say?
   (a) Describe the role of the youth leaders and adult leaders in your 4-H club.

10. What are the benefits of being in 4-H?

11. What do you look forward to doing as a 4-H member that you have not done yet?
APPENDIX E

PANEL OF EXPERTS
PANEL OF EXPERTS

Dr. Thomas Archer  
Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development  
810 Fair Rd.  
Sidney, Ohio 45365  
Expertise in Focus Group Research and Youth Development

Niki Nestor McNeely  
District Specialist, 4-H Youth Development  
303 Corporate Center Drive  
Suite 208  
Vandalia, Ohio 45377  
Expertise in 4-H Youth Development

Dr. Daney Jackson  
District Director, Ohio State University Extension  
P.O. Box 958  
17 Standpipe Road  
Jackson, Ohio 45640  
Expertise in Focus Group Research
APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
Consent Form

I agree that I have volunteered to participate in this Focus Group Interview about 4-H. I understand that:

- I will be asked questions about the 4-H program and my 4-H experiences.

- The interview will be tape recorded. My comments will be combined with all others and shared only as a group report.

- I will be offered a 4-H item as a token of appreciation for participating in this interview.

Signature____________________

Date____________________
APPENDIX G

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM
BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HSRC)
The Ohio State University

RESEARCH PROTOCOL:

96B0146 DETERMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF 4-Her's ABOUT THE UNION COUNTY
4-H PROGRAM, N.L. McCaslin, Christine F. Leeds, Agricultural Education

was presented for review by the Behavioral and Social Sciences Review Committee to ensure proper
protection of the rights and welfare of the individuals involved with consideration of the methods used
to obtain informed consent and the justification of risks in terms of potential benefits to be gained, the
Committee action was:

___ APPROVED  ___ DEFERRED*

X  APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS*  ___ DISAPPROVED

___ NO REVIEW NECESSARY

*CONDITIONS/COMMENTS:

Subjects were deemed NOT AT RISK and the protocol was unanimously APPROVED WITH
THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

1. Clarify the age group of the participants.

2. Revise the letter to the parents as follows, and forward a copy to the Committee:
   a. Print on OSU letterhead,
   b. Describe how names were obtained,
   c. Describe the storage and disposition of the notes and tapes during and upon
      completion of the study,
   d. Indicate that confidentiality can not be ensured with regard to comments made
      during a group setting,
   e. Indicate the location where the interviews will be held,
   f. Include signature blocks for both investigators, include: signature, title, OSU
      affiliation, and telephone number,
   g. The Committee waives the requirement for written parental consent in this
      study. The participants' written assent, will satisfy the informed consent
      requirement.

3. Revise the confirmation letter as follows and forward a copy to the Committee:
   a. Print on OSU letterhead,
   b. Indicate that confidentiality can not be ensured with regard to comments made
during a group setting,

c. Include signature blocks for both investigators, include: signature, title, OSU affiliation, and telephone number,

d. Describe what incentive will be offered,

e. The Committee waives the requirement for written parental consent in this study. The participants' written assent, will satisfy the informed consent requirement.

APPROVAL FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN THE PROPOSED RESEARCH APPLIES ONLY TO RESEARCH TO BE CONDUCTED SUBSEQUENT TO THE DATE OF APPROVAL.

If you agree to the above conditions, PLEASE SIGN THIS FORM IN THE SPACE PROVIDED BELOW AND RETURN WITH ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTED TO THE HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW DESK, 300 RESEARCH FOUNDATION, 1960 KENNY ROAD, CAMPUS, within one week. Upon such compliance, the approval form will be mailed to you. (In case of a deferred protocol, please submit the requested information at your earliest convenience. The next meeting of the Committee will be two weeks from the meeting date indicated above.)

Date 5/2/93

[Signatures]

Signature of principal and co-investigator

HS-025A
Rev. 2/92
(Conditions/Comments)

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