

2026

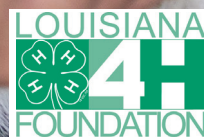
LOUISIANA 4-H

[ANNUAL
REPORT]

Louisiana
4-H Goes
to Ireland

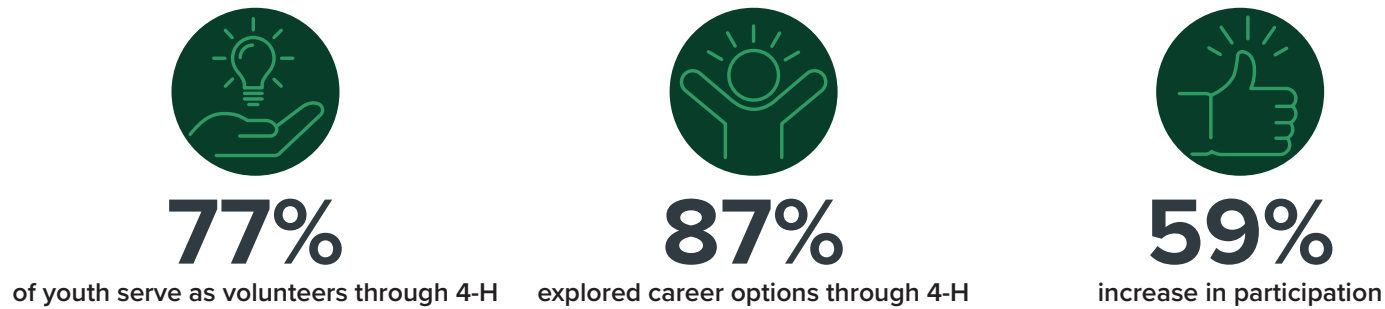


Beyond Ready



Louisiana 4-H Beyond Ready

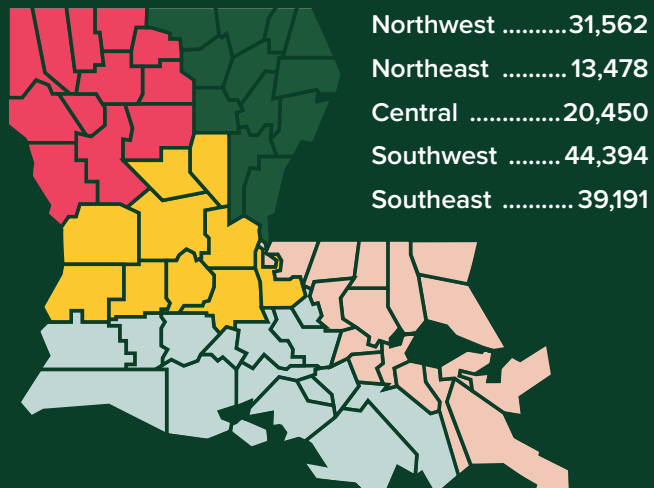
Partnering with schools to prepare **over 144,000 Louisiana youth** to be Beyond Ready — equipped with leadership, teamwork and life skills to succeed in school and beyond.



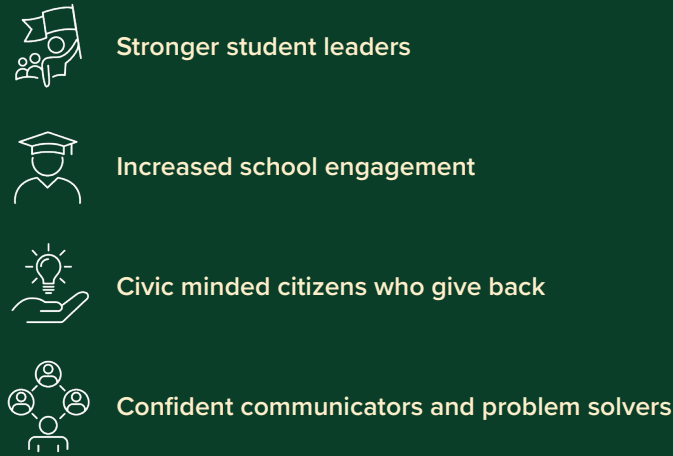
BY THE NUMBERS



Engagement by Region



Beyond Ready Youth means



Let's keep growing together.

www.LSUAgCenter.com/topics/kids_teens

COVER STORY

One hundred and thirteen Louisiana 4-H members, volunteers, parents and agents embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime journey to Ireland to explore agriculture. Through hands-on experiences at dairy farms, oyster operations and crop production sites, youth and adults gained a deeper understanding of Ireland's agricultural practices. Cover photo: Danielle Lovell, Vermilion Parish 4-H member, during the trip. [See more, Page 18.](#)



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Louisiana 4-H Alumni Spotlights.

”

I tell people, 4-H changed my life.

— Eugenia Williams, St. Landry Parish

”

Try it all and if you fail, try again.

— Clay LeBlanc, Iberville Parish

By Brittany Babineaux and Adriana Meyer

Each year, reconnecting with Louisiana 4-H alumni brings a wave of shared memories, pride in their current accomplishments and reflections on how 4-H shaped their lives. The talents and values gained through 4-H stay with members long after their final club meeting — because once a 4-H'er, always a 4-H'er.

Yet, as members graduate from high school, they often lose touch. This summer, a Louisiana 4-H intern took on the challenge of rekindling those connections. Through the Louisiana 4-H Alumni Survey, alumni from across the state — and beyond — shared where life has taken them, how 4-H continues to influence them and whether they'd like to be more involved today.

The response was inspiring. The survey reached over 250 alumni from nearly every parish in Louisiana, 16 states and even a few countries. Their stories are filled with purpose: studying trades and degrees, serving communities as educators and healthcare professionals, launching businesses and nonprofits, and giving back as volunteers.

THESE SPOTLIGHTS CELEBRATE THEIR JOURNEYS AND THE LEGACY OF 4-H

Clay LeBlanc and Eugenia Williams

Clay LeBlanc of Iberville Parish and **Eugenia Williams** of St. Landry Parish met at LOST Camp and formed a friendship that grew through years of leadership in 4-H. Both served on the State Executive Board — LeBlanc as parliamentarian and Williams as secretary — supporting each other through conferences, competitions and life transitions.

LeBlanc is now pursuing a doctorate in optometry, and Williams is earning her master's in international relations at Carnegie Mellon University. They credit 4-H with teaching them time management, public speaking and adaptability. Their story highlights how 4-H builds not only leaders, but lifelong connections that shape futures.

When asked what advice they would give to a current 4-H member, both encouraged youth to try new things and to try everything at least once.

“Try it all and if you fail, try again,” LeBlanc said.

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Photo at right: Eugenia Williams, left, and Clay LeBlanc first met as campers at LOST camp and quickly became friends. Through camps and conferences, they also learned practical life skills such as cooking, financial readiness, and even how to book a flight and pack for a trip. Photo provided by Eugenia Williams and Clay LeBlanc





Don't be afraid to take risks, learn from mistakes and ask for feedback to grow.

— Brittany Thomas, St. Landry Parish

Brittany Thomas

Brittany Thomas, a proud alumna of St. Landry Parish 4-H, credits the program with shaping her identity and career path. From her early days in 4-H clubs to serving as Junior Leader president and a SET Board member, Thomas embraced every opportunity to lead and grow. Her most transformative experience came as a camp counselor, where she discovered the power of mentorship and emotional support.

4-H equipped her with the tools to face unfamiliar situations with confidence and lead effectively. Today, she is pursuing a Master of Social Work at Tulane University, building on degrees in sociology and public administration. Thomas continues to live the 4-H pledge — especially “my hands to larger service” — as she prepares to serve communities through social work.



Tanya Bearden volunteers at a 4-H shooting sports event. Photo provided by Tanya Bearden

Tanya Bearden

Tanya Bearden's 4-H journey began in Bossier Parish, where she showed pigs, sheep and horses and joined the Junior Leadership Club. Her experiences instilled a strong work ethic and a passion for helping others, which led her to a career in nursing.

Now a parent and volunteer, Bearden continues to give back in many ways. She coaches members in shooting sports, serves as an adviser, serves on the Shooting Sports Advisory Committee, participates as a national crew member for the National Shooting Sports Competition and volunteers whenever she can. She credits 4-H with helping her become confident, responsible and community-minded. Bearden's story is a testament to how 4-H values can span generations and inspire lifelong service.

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Kristi Martin Maupin

Growing up on a horse farm in Webster Parish, **Kristi Martin Maupin's** 4-H journey began with livestock projects and evolved into leadership and personal development. She competed in barrel racing and horse shows, winning Grand Champion Paint Gelding in 1992. Maupin later served as a camp counselor, club president and parish officer, gaining skills in communication, organization and resilience.

Her 4-H experiences helped her build a strong professional foundation, leading to a marketing degree and a master's from Michigan State University. Maupin encourages youth to embrace every opportunity — even those outside their comfort zones — because that's where growth begins. The wide range of experiences 4-H provided her, from trying her hand at showing a hog to creating unforgettable memories at 4-H events, helped prepare her for the future.



Kristi Martin Maupin took first place in the 2-year-old gelding category and overall Grand Champion Gelding with her horse, Ima Top Gunner, in the 1992 State 4-H Horse Show at LSU. Photo provided by Kristi Martin Maupin

Mattea Smith

Avoyelles Parish alumna **Mattea Smith** discovered her strengths through 4-H shooting sports, cooking and sewing. As a Louisiana's shooting sports ambassador and competitor, she found support from mentors and family that helped her thrive. Her experiences taught her the value of feedback, communication and resilience — skills she now uses in her role working with government officials on energy policy.

Smith encourages youth to try new things and embrace learning, reminding them that 4-H is more than projects — it's preparation for life.



Find something you love and try something new.

— Mattea Smith, Avoyelles Parish



The full stories from this year's alumni spotlights can also be found as part of Voices of 4-H on the Alumni page. Connecting with alumni is always a joy and a powerful reminder of what 4-H can do. As Louisiana 4-H supports the national goal of reaching 10 million members nationwide over the next five years, volunteers are more essential than ever. Whether you have time to judge a contest, speak to a club or lead a project, 4-H offers flexible opportunities that fit your schedule and interests. **Scan the QR code to begin your volunteer journey.**

4-H members are Beyond Ready. Ready then. Ready now. Ready for anything.



Ashley Edwards unloads Bertha, an artificial insemination simulator, while youth observe. Photo provided by Tripp Morgan

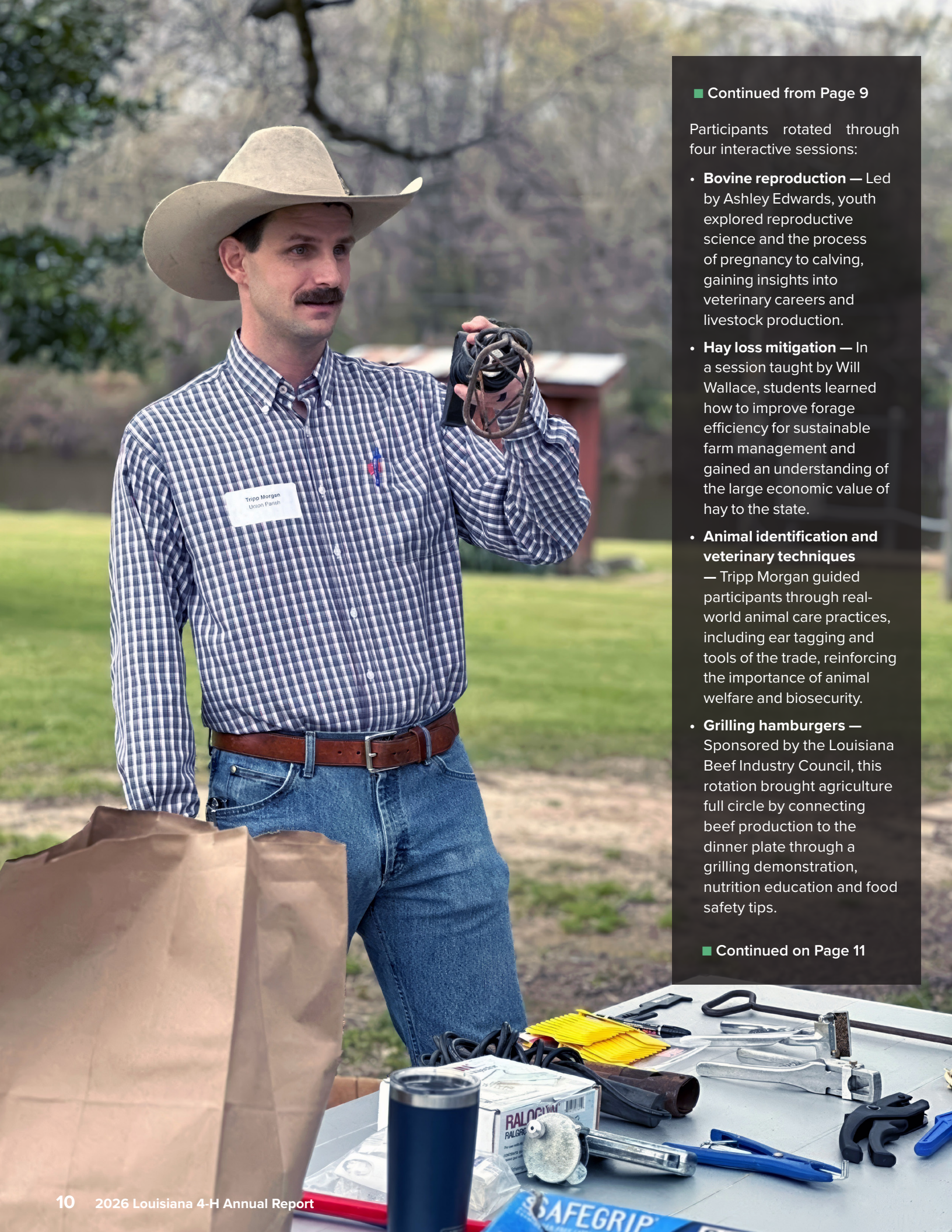
Beef, Forage and Futures.

Empowering Youth Through Experience

By Ashley Powell

The 2025 Beef and Forage Youth Field Day empowered 34 youth and 13 adults from eight parishes to take meaningful steps toward gaining the skills, confidence and knowledge needed to lead in agriculture and beyond. Marketed to 4-H and FFA members in grades eight through 12, the event offered a dynamic blend of hands-on learning, career exploration and leadership development.

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Participants rotated through four interactive sessions:

- **Bovine reproduction** — Led by Ashley Edwards, youth explored reproductive science and the process of pregnancy to calving, gaining insights into veterinary careers and livestock production.
- **Hay loss mitigation** — In a session taught by Will Wallace, students learned how to improve forage efficiency for sustainable farm management and gained an understanding of the large economic value of hay to the state.
- **Animal identification and veterinary techniques** — Tripp Morgan guided participants through real-world animal care practices, including ear tagging and tools of the trade, reinforcing the importance of animal welfare and biosecurity.
- **Grilling hamburgers** — Sponsored by the Louisiana Beef Industry Council, this rotation brought agriculture full circle by connecting beef production to the dinner plate through a grilling demonstration, nutrition education and food safety tips.

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Left page: Tripp Morgan, assistant extension agent, discusses animal identification practices. Above: Food safety lessons are taught while participants wait for charcoal to be ready for grilling. Photos provided by Tripp Morgan

■ Continued from Page 10

Throughout the day, youth practiced communication, teamwork and problem-solving while connecting classroom learning to real-world applications and future careers.

The idea of this event originated when Tripp Morgan, assistant extension agent for livestock and forages in the Northeast Region, received requests from youth wanting to attend the adult Beef and Forage Field Day.

“There were 4-H and FFA members interested in coming to the adult field day, but we didn’t have the capacity for that” Morgan said. “That is when I knew there was high interest in having a youth field day and I needed to make that happen.”

According to Hannah Craddock, assistant extension agent for 4-H youth development in Franklin Parish, the participants were highly engaged during the day.

“The ear tagging was a large learning curve for one of my 4-H’ers,” Craddock said. “The day encouraged this family to become more interested in learning about livestock and they have attended other livestock events since the field day.”

The Beef and Forage Youth Field Day provided a powerful platform for cultivating the next generation of agricultural leaders — young people who are Beyond Ready to shape the future. Plans for the 2026 event are already underway. ■



As an agent, I will for sure promote this event again next year.

— Hannah Craddock, Franklin Parish

4-H Launches a New Generation of Career Ready Leaders

By Meggan Franks, Christina Hebert, Asia Delasbour, Madeline Smith and Mayar Nickols

As 4-H members explore and pursue their sparks, they cultivate critical life skills, such as communication, responsibility, adaptability and confidence. Louisiana 4-H is preparing youth for life and for work in an ever-evolving workforce landscape. A recent longitudinal study of more than 2,000 written reflections completed by 4-H graduating seniors has captured critical data on career readiness outcomes, leadership growth and life skills cultivated through 4-H.

4-H'ers on how 4-H prepared them for life after high school:

”

4-H has prepared me to be a leader in life who makes smart choices. It has taught me how to communicate and get along with others. 4-H is the reason why I love to volunteer and help people in my community. 4-H has prepared me beyond my high-school years to be able to go out into the world, unafraid to speak my mind and lend a helping hand.

— Jasmine Sneed, Bienville Parish

4-H has shown me what it means to be a servant leader and helped foster a dedication to community service. Above all, 4-H has taught me that the true meaning of success is the ability to never be afraid to try something new, because you never know what lies behind that unknown door.

— Gabrielle Fontenot, Evangeline Parish

Through 4-H, I have gained valuable skills like work ethic, communication, leadership and knowledge.

— Lauren Gauthier, Avoyelles Parish

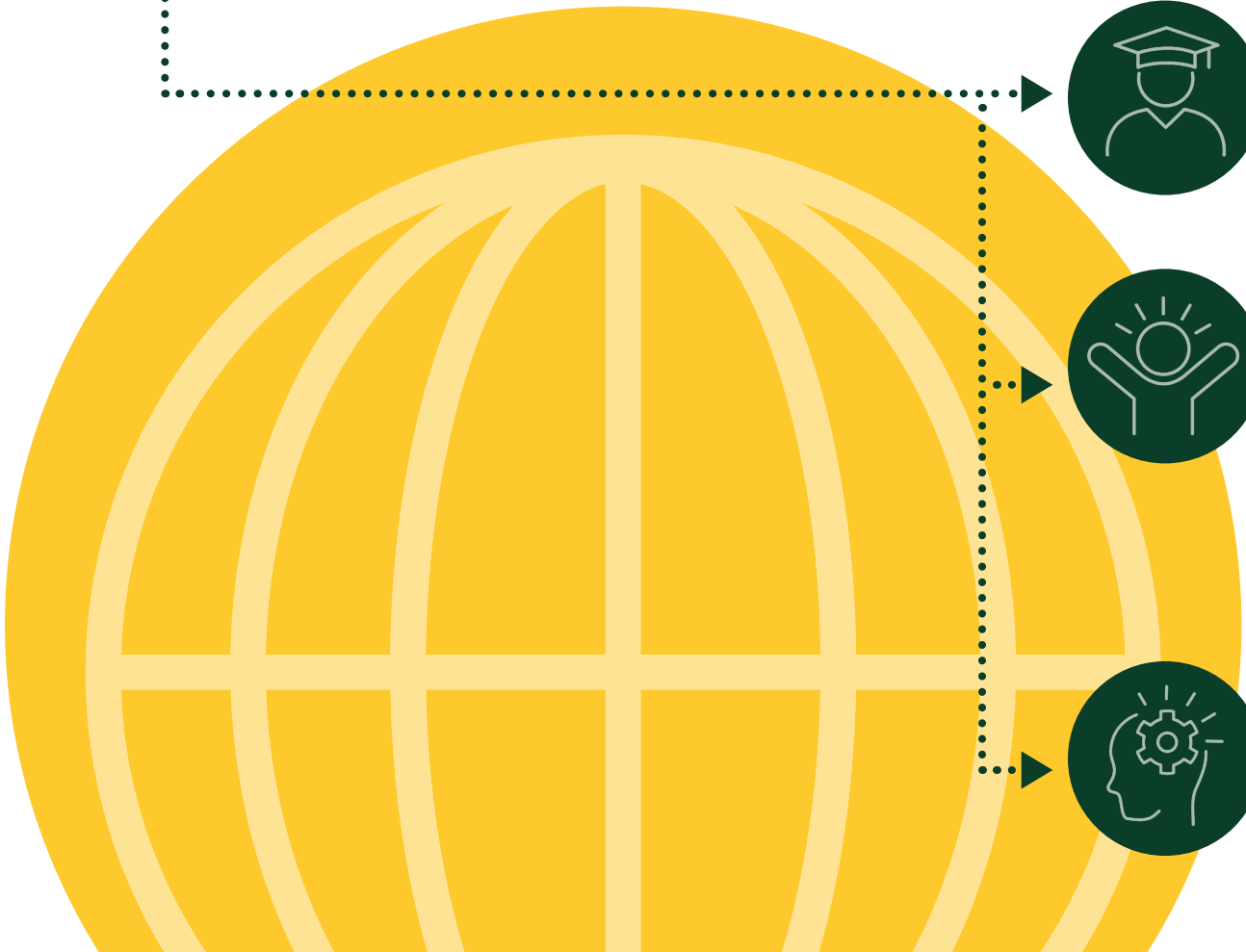
Participating in 4-H taught me how to be more comfortable talking to new people and trying new things. I have learned to think critically and solve problems. I have also grown in my ability to communicate with others.

— Anna Claire Nadler, Ouachita Parish

4-H has helped me learn necessary skills that have prepared me for not only the demands of college but also for success in the workforce. 4-H has taught me how important it is to get outside of my comfort zone and try new things.

— Kaylee Musgrove, Bossier Parish

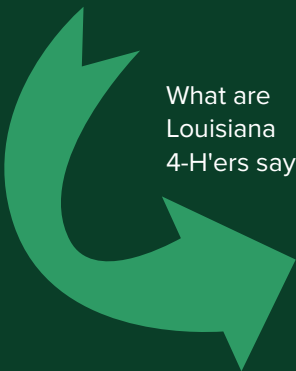
4-H cultivates **career readiness** and employability skills, such as communication, leadership, teamwork and problem solving. These skills are aligned with National Association of Colleges and Employers' career readiness competencies.



Over **70%** of youth directly connect 4-H to future workforce and college success

1 in 10 participants explicitly describe being challenged to try harder — evidence of resilience development

Youth attribute their **confidence** and **adaptability** to 4-H's experiential learning model



What are Louisiana 4-H'ers saying?

64% Youth feel 4-H influences college and career readiness (**26% higher than national average**)

77% Youth serve as volunteers through 4-H (**6% higher than national average**)

58% Youth note the influence of 4-H on postsecondary pathway support (**17% higher than national average**)

87% Youth had the opportunity to explore career choices (**23% higher than national average**)

78% Youth know employers expect 4-H'ers to do a job well because of their involvement (**5% higher than national average**)

Cooking Up Confidence.

Makenzie Waggoner's Culinary Journey

By Claire Zak and Megan Martin

In the heart of Bienville Parish, where community and tradition run deep, Makenzie Waggoner discovered her passion for cooking through the local 4-H program. What began as a simple interest in cooking evolved into a culinary career — one that would take her to one of America's most prestigious resorts.

Waggoner's journey began with Bienville Parish 4-H, where she eagerly signed up for food and nutrition projects. Her 4-H Agent, Megan Martin, saw a spark in her and knew that with a little love and encouragement she could live out her dreams.

"Ms. Megan and 4-H taught me that I do have the confidence to pursue a career in pastry. She wants all 4-Hers — not just her kids — to strive for excellence," Waggoner said.

Martin believed in her so much that she encouraged Waggoner and two of her friends to compete in the Next Healthy Food Star contest at 4-H University. Not only did this competition allow Waggoner to compete at a state level, but her team also won first place. From that placement, she earned the opportunity to compete at the Great American Seafood Cook-Off in New Orleans at the Louisiana Foodservice and Hospitality Expo. The experience opened her world completely, and Waggoner began to believe that she could pursue her dreams of becoming a professional chef. For a girl from Bienville Parish, it was a moment of pride and proof that her passion had real potential.

Seeing this dream unfold, Martin continued to encourage Waggoner to pursue her goals, giving her opportunities to cook on parish, regional, state and even national levels. That support carried Waggoner through her high school years and into culinary school.

Today, Waggoner works as a pastry chef at The Greenbrier in West Virginia, a luxury resort known for its world-class cuisine and historic charm. In the resort's elegant kitchens, she crafts desserts that delight guests from around the globe — each one a reflection of the journey that began as a Bienville parish 4-Her.

”

We are [all] born with the ingredients for the recipe, you just have to do the mixing and baking.

— Makenzie Waggoner



Background: Makenzie Waggoner displays some of her pastry creations at The Greenbrier resort. Top: Makenzie Waggoner, right, second pastry chef at The Greenbrier, is joined by Jean-Francois Suteau, executive pastry chef. Bottom: The Greenbrier is located in West Virginia. Photos provided by Makenzie Waggoner

Teens Leading Change.

Empowering Youth To Build Healthier Communities in Jefferson and Orleans Parishes



Top: Youth at Sarah T. Reed High School in Orleans Parish participate in a Teens Leading Change group. Left: Several Orleans Parish youths volunteered at AgMagic on the River. Photos by Courtney Budenich



I liked being a leader and teaching the kids.
— Youth participant

The impact of the Teens Leading Change initiative was significant: In a peer-led evaluation of **219** students, **93%** reported learning something new about healthy food, felt more confident in making healthy choices and planned to continue those habits beyond the program.

By Claire Zak and Lauren Faust

Louisiana ranks 50th in the nation for overall health, with childhood obesity and chronic illness posing persistent challenges across the state. In response, the LSU AgCenter 4-H team launched the Teens Leading Change initiative in Jefferson and Orleans parishes — a youth-led movement designed to promote wellness, leadership and civic engagement through community-driven projects. This program is currently funded by a U. S. Department of Agriculture Children, Youth, and Families at Risk grant. Working in teen-led coalitions, participants identify health challenges in their communities and develop innovative solutions that foster long-term behavior change.

In Jefferson Parish, Riverdale High School youth tackled poor nutrition head-on through the Healthy Snack Swap

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Top left: Jefferson Parish youth conduct a healthy snack lesson. Top right: Jefferson Parish youth learn about healthy snack alternatives. Photos by Claire Zak

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Challenge. Teens developed a creative campaign to promote healthier snack alternatives. Their efforts sparked conversations about replacing unhealthy options in school vending machines and their snack shack — a process that continues to evolve.

One participant was very appreciative of the education saying, “I think about all the information I have about different choices.” These results reflect the ripple effect of youth-led education and advocacy on broader school culture.

In Orleans Parish, youth at Sarah T. Reed High School formed their Teens Leading Change cohort and immersed themselves in health promotion across school, parish and regional events. From organizing beautification projects and toy drives to leading hydration and fitness activities at AgMagic and Latin Fest, teens demonstrated leadership, empathy and cultural awareness.

The Teens Leading Change program showed strong results in helping youth grow and improve their communities. Teens became more confident in social situations, felt supported by peers and had more chances to show maturity. They improved critical thinking and openness to new ideas, and rated the program highly for safety, fairness and adult support. More than 90% joined other after-school programs, showing lasting engagement.

The Teens Leading Change program is more than a health initiative — it is a blueprint for empowering youth to lead with purpose. By combining education, advocacy and hands-on service, Jefferson and Orleans parish teens are transforming their communities and themselves. As Louisiana 4-H looks to expand this model statewide, the success of these pilot programs offers a compelling case for youth-led wellness as a catalyst for lasting change. ■

Louisiana 4-H Goes to Ireland



Photos provided by
"This Week in Louisiana
Agriculture" and Louisiana
Farm Bureau



By Hannah Devall and Lanette Hebert

One hundred and thirteen Louisiana 4-H members, volunteers, parents and agents embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime journey to Ireland to explore agriculture. This 10-day experience marked the first international trip sponsored by the Louisiana 4-H program in partnership with EF Tours.

While participants enjoyed tourist destinations such as Dublin and the Cliffs of Moher, the heart of the trip was in the Irish countryside. Through hands-on experiences at dairy farms,

oyster operations and crop production sites, youth and adults gained a deeper understanding of Ireland's agricultural practices, the passion of its farmers, and their challenges.

This journey was more than sightseeing — it was a collaborative learning experience. The success of the trip was made possible through the combined efforts of Louisiana 4-H staff, EF Tours, local Irish hosts and the families who supported their children's participation. Together, they created

an environment where youth could grow, ask questions and connect their interests to real-world applications.

Beyond Ready: Life skills and career preparation

Throughout the trip, Louisiana 4-H youth actively developed essential life skills aligned with National 4-H's Beyond Ready initiative, which prepares young

people to thrive in college, careers and life.

From navigating international travel to engaging in meaningful conversations with Irish agricultural professionals, participants practiced adaptability, communication and problem-solving in real-world settings. They gained confidence in their ability to collaborate, lead and think critically — skills that are foundational to future success. Whether exploring sustainable farming or reflecting on their own career aspirations, youth returned home not only inspired but better equipped to

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The experience deepened my child’s interest in environmental conservation and crop production. It also showed him how he could use his passion for photography to promote agriculture and Louisiana.

— Parent comment



Top: Louisiana Farm Bureau’s Karl Wiggers, at camera, guides 4-H youth through media training, helping them develop interviewing and communication skills. Bottom: Participants visit an Irish crop production site, gaining insight into sustainable farming practices. Right: An Irish farmer shares insights into sheep husbandry.

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In the trip participant survey, 90.5% of the 23 respondents strongly agreed that they learned how the agricultural systems in Ireland differ from those in the United States, observed at least one innovative farming technique and felt that interacting with local farmers influenced their perspective.

Friendships formed

For many participants, this trip was more than an educational adventure — it was a transformative experience. Traveling abroad with fellow 4-H members from across Louisiana gave youth a new lens through which to view the world and their place in it. The

friendships forged during this journey are irreplaceable, built on shared discoveries, laughter and meaningful conversations. These connections and the broadened perspectives gained will continue to shape their lives long after returning home.

A key partner in strengthening the reach of this experience was the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, which sent two members of its communications team, Karl Wiggers and Josh Meeks, to document the journey. Through features on “This Week in Louisiana Agriculture,” engaging social media posts, blog entries and a dedicated podcast episode, Louisiana Farm Bureau helped share the story of



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However, I’m constantly amazed when I’m reminded of the excellence that comes out of the youth programs and the well-rounded adults they become,” shared Meeks. “I think this Ireland trip was a cool way for these students to grow, and I feel very lucky to have been a part.”

Parents noted the profound impact the trip had on their children.

“Louisiana 4-H Goes to Ireland” with a broader audience. Their involvement not only showcased the trip’s highlights but also celebrated the growth and potential of Louisiana’s youth.

“I’ve been working at Louisiana Farm Bureau for almost a decade and working with students through Louisiana 4-H for about that long.

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One shared, “My son was able to have one-on-one conversations with our guides and felt truly respected for his agricultural interests.”

The Ireland trip exemplifies how partnerships can expand the reach and depth of 4-H programming. By blending cultural exploration with agricultural education, Louisiana 4-H continues to empower youth to become informed, inspired and globally minded leaders. ■

More than Cows and Cooking.

By Esther Boe, Jeannie Crnkovic, Lauren Faust, Lanette Hebert and Ashley Powell

When most people think of 4-H, images of livestock shows and baking contests often come to mind. While those events are an important part of the program, today's 4-H is more diverse, offering a wide range of programs that reflect the growing interests of youth across Louisiana and beyond. From robotics and environmental science to photography, leadership and community service, 4-H has expanded its reach to meet young people where they are — empowering them to explore their sparks, build life skills and prepare for the future.

Coastal Club, St. Mary Parish

To better engage high school students where traditional 4-H clubs were underperforming, agents partnered with a dedicated volunteer to launch three 4-H Coastal Clubs focused on Louisiana's coastal environment. While still offering core 4-H experiences, the clubs emphasized environmental education through activities such as marsh grass workshops led by Sea Grant, a planting field trip, visits to the LSU Center for River Studies, sessions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and hands-on restoration work on FWS land. This targeted approach has proven effective in connecting teens with conservation-focused projects and encouraging exploration of related college and career paths.



St. Mary 4-H Coastal Club members participate in hands-on coastal restoration projects in addition to what they learn about in club meetings. Photo provided by St. Mary Parish 4-H

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I felt very connected to our work in the marsh because I live in Louisiana. I felt like I was working to protect my own home.

— Aaden Wiggins, 4-H member, high school senior

Through our Morgan City High School Coastal Club and the local connections we have made, we are able to take the classroom outdoors. Students are learning and creating lifelong memories.

— Leslie Smith, MCHS Coastal Club sponsor

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Beekeeping Club member Goldie Keller shared, "Field days in the spring when we get to spend time with the hives is my favorite." Photo provided by Acadia Parish 4-H

Beekeeping Club, Acadia Parish

A successful beekeeper wanted to spread her knowledge and chose to partner with the Acadia 4-H program. The Acadia Parish 4-H Beekeeping Club is an engaging and educational program designed to introduce youth to the world of beekeeping and environmental stewardship. Under the guidance of a local beekeeper, the club offers hands-on experiences that teach students about the vital role bees play in agriculture and ecosystems. Members participate in interactive projects such as candle-making fundraisers and learning about hive behavior and bee health. The club not only fosters agricultural knowledge but also emphasizes life skills like teamwork, responsibility and community service.



Adventure Awaits: Conservation Day Camp, Natchitoches Parish

Partnering with passionate environmental collaborators, the Natchitoches Parish 4-H office hosted a unique camp experience designed to inspire a love for nature and promote environmental stewardship among youth. With key support from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, campers engaged in hands-on activities focused on Louisiana's ecosystems, including wildlife identification, invasive species and wilderness survival. LDWF staff also led sessions on environmental awareness and water safety, including life jacket fitting, while outdoor exploration through fishing and kayaking — often first-time experiences for many campers — deepened their connection to the natural world.



A Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries agent educates youth on how to identify Louisiana wildlife with pelts and furs. Photo provided by Natchitoches Parish 4-H

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Horticulture Club, West Feliciana Parish

At the 2024 West Feliciana Joint Advisory Committee meeting, a need was identified to teach youth about gardening and food origins, leading to the creation of a 4-H Horticulture Club through a partnership between 4-H agent Katlin Gordon, area Agriculture and Natural Resources agent Jessie Hoover and the Master Gardeners. The club introduces members to horticulture while preparing them for careers in environmental and agricultural fields. Activities have included learning about succulents, planting a spring garden at the 4-H office and participating in a community service project with the Council on Aging. Upcoming sessions will focus on floral design, succulent gardens and continued service-learning opportunities.



Horticulture agent Jessie Hoover, in the green jacket, explains the types of succulents to the West Feliciana Horticulture Club. Photo provided by Katlin Gordon

Horticulture Club has opened my eyes to the world of plants more than I imagined. Getting to do it alongside my friends made it even better.

— Evelyn Pollet, 4-H member

Horticulture Club has not only taught me about how different plants flourish in different environments, but how they also can adapt to new ones. This club has given me the chance to communicate and learn first-hand from more experienced horticulturalists. I am so excited to learn more about the future career I want to pursue.

— Peyton Daniel, 4-H member

Victoria's Educational Garden, Natchitoches Parish

Natchitoches 4-H member Victoria Wiggins identified a need in her community and created Victoria's Educational Garden — a space that promotes environmental awareness, sustainable practices and healthy living. Through hands-on workshops in planting, composting and organic pest control, the garden teaches essential skills while encouraging self-sufficiency and better dietary choices. By incorporating native plants and eco-friendly methods, it supports local wildlife and educates residents on preserving ecosystems, with topics like pollinator gardening and water conservation inspiring community members to act in their own backyards.

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Natchitoches teens work together to design eye-catching items to be used to enhance Victoria's Educational Garden. Photo provided by Natchitoches Parish 4-H

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The Sailing Club in Pointe Coupee Parish offers a new option for 4-H members. Photo provided by Gabriella Lorusso

Sailing Club, Pointe Coupee Parish

The Pointe Coupee Parish 4-H Sailing Club offers youth a unique opportunity to explore the rich aquatic heritage of their community while learning essential water safety and sailing skills. Through hands-on experiences with small vessels, participants gain confidence in navigating waterways, understanding wind and weather patterns, and practicing responsible boating techniques. The program also immerses participants in the culture of a parish deeply shaped by its proximity to the Mississippi River and surrounding lakes, fostering an appreciation for local history, ecology and traditions tied to Oxbow Lake, also known as False River. Through sailing education, youth discover how generations have lived and worked along the bayous. The club blends adventure with education in a way that connects young sailors to both their environment and their community.

Running Club, East Baton Rouge Parish

The 4-H Kids Can Run Club is a dynamic youth fitness initiative in East Baton Rouge Parish that fosters healthy habits, confidence and social skills through the joy of running. Founded by Meggan Franks, LSU assistant professor and avid runner, in collaboration with East Baton Rouge Parish 4-H, the club operates in Zachary and at the LSU track, engaging 48 youth members in the most recent year.

A standout feature is its partnership with LSU Track and Field. Collegiate athletes mentor participants, contributing 72 volunteer hours in 2024 valued at \$1,972. Sessions, held twice monthly, follow a structured routine including warm-ups, stretching, the 4-H pledge, fitness and educational activities, and reflection. Youth learn key skills like running form, breathing, strength training and sports health, while earning shoe charms for every 3,500 steps logged. With over 2 million cumulative steps tracked since inception, the club promotes inclusive fitness in a state where 19.1% of children face obesity, offering alternatives for those not involved in school sports. Parents consistently praise the club's positive impact on confidence, friendships and enthusiasm for fitness, describing it as "amazing, fun and inclusive."

My child said he loves the running club. He is always excited to go and talk about his experience when he gets home. The club is amazing, fun and inclusive.

— 4-H parent

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Zoology club members were able to take a tour of the Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo. Photo provided by Lena Thornton

Zoology Club, Ouachita Parish

It's a wild one in Ouachita Parish. The 4-H Zoology Club exemplifies what it means to be Beyond Ready — empowering youth to lead with purpose, serve with heart and learn through action. Through the vision of zoo and project volunteer Mark Snellgrove, this project club was born. By partnering with the Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo, 4-H'ers aren't just learning about careers in animal science. They're actively shaping their community through conservation-focused service. From building exhibits to crafting bird feeders, each hands-on project builds curiosity and leadership, proving that when young minds are given the tools and trust to explore, they go far Beyond Ready — they go extraordinary. ■



Zoology club members take a break to pose at a photo spot at the Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo. Photos provided by Lena Thornton



This club has helped the zoo through various service projects and helped the 4-H'ers learn about the animals and conservation of their habitats. They love coming and learning.

— Lena Thornton, Ouachita Parish 4-H agent

LSU AgCenter Receives Donation for Camp Grant Walker Renovations

By Anthony Bailey

At the 2025 LSU AgCenter Livestock Show, LSU AgCenter and 4-H leadership came together to commend a significant donation to the Louisiana 4-H Foundation.

Jeannette Thomason donated \$250,000 for renovations of bathhouses at the Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center in Pollock, which hosts 4-H camp programs. A check presentation was made during the livestock show on Feb. 17 at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales.

Jon Carr, executive director of the Louisiana 4-H Foundation, received the check along with Matt Lee, LSU vice president for agriculture and dean of the College of Agriculture. Lee was full of praise for Thomason, who has been a donor to Louisiana 4-H in the past.

"Every once in a while in life, you come across somebody who has a big heart, who has a set of values that are in the right place and they have the capacity and the means to make a difference," Lee said. "In this event, Ms. Jeannette and her family are giving \$250,000 to renovate Camp Grant Walker to impact generations of youth."

Thomason is also the donor for the showmanship award that is given out to the top showman at the livestock show. This recognition comes with a \$5,000 reward from the Thomason family.

In addition to weeklong summer camps, the Grant Walker 4-H Educational Center also holds programming throughout the year and has been part of the 4-H experience for more than 100 years.

"This is truly going to impact young people for decades to come. We're excited to be able to do this, and we've been trying to find a way to get it done," Lee said. "We're looking to enhance the experience with these young people, and she and her family have stepped up and really made a tremendously significant donation."



Above: LSU AgCenter and 4-H leadership surround Jeanette Thomason. From left, Tara Smith, executive associate vice president and director of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service; Kimberly Williams, interim assistant 4-H department head and instructor; Matt Lee, LSU senior vice chancellor for agriculture and dean of the LSU College of agriculture; Thomason; Todd Tarifa, interim associate director of youth development for LCES and 4-H department head; and Jon Carr, executive director of the Louisiana 4-H Foundation. Below: Jeanette Thomason signs a check at the LSU AgCenter Livestock Show in Gonzales. Photos by Anthony Bailey





Heroes Among Us.

Members of the St. Genevieve 4-H Club initiated a service project to give back to Maddie's Footprints. They made bookmarks for the organization to give to the women they serve — mothers grieving the loss of a baby. Photo provided by Tara Boone

Lafayette Parish Empowers 4-H Leaders To Save the Day

By Lanette Hebert

With a rapidly growing population and an expanding school system, Lafayette Parish has experienced a surge in 4-H club participation. To meet the rising demand and continue delivering high-quality youth programming, the 4-H team has called upon a new league of heroes — Superhero 4-H Leaders — dedicated volunteers stepping into superhero-inspired roles to help lead the way.

Originally piloted in 2019 with input from state, regional and parish 4-H faculty, as well as experienced club leaders, the initiative was refined in 2024 and has since yielded impressive results. The

program elevates volunteer involvement, allowing agents to focus on growing and supporting the 4-H program.

As the school system expanded, so did the number of 4-H clubs — now approaching more than 60 across the parish. While this growth is a testament to the program's success, it also brought challenges. Monthly club visits, increased project requests and expanding school enrichment programming stretched the agent team thin.

In response, the 4-H team brainstormed innovative strategies and recognized a powerful resource already in place: their volunteers. By empowering these

individuals, the team saw an opportunity to not only sustain the program but expand its reach even further.

To identify Superhero 4-H Leaders, 4-H agents review club records such as Club of the Month and Achievement Awards and look for volunteers who consistently support contest days, encourage high member participation in parish events and submit project records for judging.

The Superhero 4-H Leaders receive specialized training and ongoing support to help them succeed in their roles. Training begins with a welcome breakfast where expectations are

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The 4-H superhero program has allowed our St. Genevieve School 4-H club to branch off in so many different directions to support our members. Students have initiated many service programs to positively impact the community.

— Tara Boone, Superhero 4-H Leader



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outlined and club lessons for the year are introduced. Leaders also participate in a share session during parishwide leader training, allowing them to exchange ideas and best practices with other volunteers.

Beyond initial training, leaders receive communication and guidance throughout the year. This includes monthly updates on upcoming events, lesson materials and reminders to report club meetings for Club of the Month recognition. The goal is to ensure leaders feel supported, informed and confident as they take on a more active role in their clubs.

Amber Guillot, a Superhero 4-H Leader at First Baptist Christian School, shared her thoughts on the effort.

“Great leaders aren’t born — they’re built through shared learning, dedication and teamwork. Lafayette Superhero 4-H Leaders take on the task of leading together.”

Kessler Landry, Superhero 4-H Leader at Martial F. Billeaud Elementary shared, “The 4-H Superhero program has allowed our school’s 4-H leaders to fully immerse themselves in the 4-H program, which has created a stronger sense of 4-H community between the leaders, officers and members.”

Agents attend three meetings each year with the Superhero 4-H Leader schools: one in September to kick off enrollment, another in November to prepare for the records contest and a final meeting in March to wrap up the year. One of the key benefits of this program is that many of the Superhero 4-H Leaders have recruited coleaders to assist them, helping distribute responsibilities and providing support. Leaders also appreciate the flexibility and autonomy



the program offers. If a last-minute schedule change occurs on campus, they can adjust without needing to coordinate extensively with the 4-H team, reducing stress and disruption.

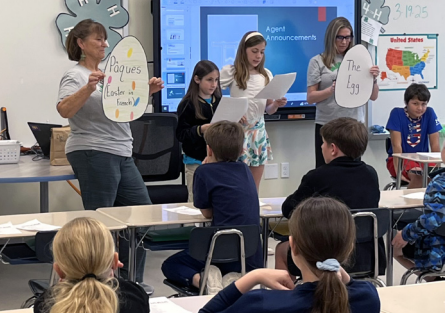
As leaders become more engaged in parish-level activities, they gain a deeper understanding of the program, which equips them to better explain processes and answer questions from their members. Additionally, these leaders serve on the Volunteer Development Task Force, contributing to planning and decision-making for major parish events.

According to Todd Tarifa, associate director of youth development for Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service and 4-H department head, the program represents a powerful shift in how 4-H operates statewide. He said volunteers are essential to sustaining and expanding the program’s reach.

Tarifa explained that the Superhero model embodies volunteer-led program delivery, which allows agents to serve primarily as program managers rather than sole implementers. This shift enables agents to focus on strategic growth, outreach and quality assurance, while trained volunteers lead clubs, deliver educational content and support events.

“The Lafayette 4-H program exemplifies this model” Tarifa said. “By emphasizing volunteer empowerment and program management, they have cultivated a system where agents see themselves as leaders of volunteer teams, rather than sole providers of programming. This not only expands the program’s capacity but also improves work-life balance for agents and enhances the overall quality of youth experiences.”

Nicole Gerard and Charles Hebert contributed to this story.



Left: Jill Myers is dedicated to the volunteer model and works with the Carencro Catholic Club. Photo provided by Nicole Gerard. Middle: Superhero 4-H Leaders review club meeting lessons at one of their training and networking meetings. Photo provided by Nicole Gerard. Right: Superhero 4-H Leaders work hand in hand with club members in planning and implementing 4-H club meetings. Photo provided by Kessler Landry



Volunteers are the backbone of 4-H’s ability to grow and reach more youth across diverse communities. Their contributions go beyond simple service — they embody the principles of program management, acting as strategic partners who extend the reach and impact of 4-H programming.

— Todd Tarifa, associate director of youth development for LCES and 4-H department head

The Seed’s Journey Cultivates Curiosity

By Esther Boe and Lanette Hebert

To deepen agricultural awareness and promote hands-on learning, the Central and Southwest regions joined forces in launching an innovative educational experience titled **The Seed’s Journey**. This interactive project is designed to teach youth about the life cycle of a seed — from germination to harvest and ultimately to the plate.

The initiative was developed in response to regional feedback gathered through the Regional Leadership Council advisory process, which identified agricultural literacy and food origin education as key priorities in both the Central and Southwest regions. The Seed’s Journey directly addresses these needs by providing a structured, engaging way for youth to explore where their food comes from and how it grows. The program was a collaborative effort of 4-H regional coordinators along with LSU AgCenter Agriculture and Natural Resource agent Justin Dufour and Kathryn Fontenot, Southwest Region director and horticulturist.

At the heart of the project is a portable walking path that visually and physically guides students through each stage of a seed’s development. Designed for use at agricultural awareness events such as AgMagic Cenla and the Southwest Region Vegetable Field Day, the pathway includes illustrated segments and supplemental lessons tailored for kindergarten through elementary-aged youth.

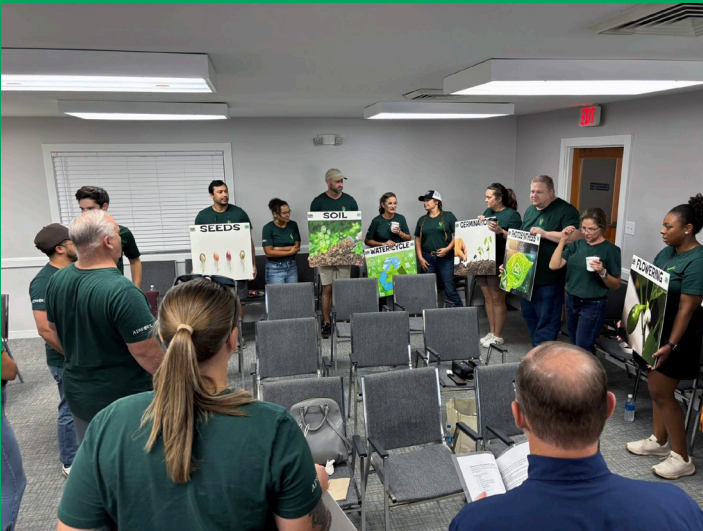
The program teaches youth about the life cycle of a seed through hands-on gardening activities while introducing key scientific concepts like photosynthesis and nutrient uptake. It also promotes environmental responsibility, healthy eating and social-emotional development, while inspiring interest in agriculture and related careers.

The Acadia Extension Team incorporated The Seed’s Journey into a pumpkin workshop.

“I thought it was a fun game that made the kids have to listen and think,” said Ashley Barfield, horticulture agent.

Beyond its immediate educational benefits, The Seed’s Journey aims to create long-term positive outcomes by empowering youth to become informed, responsible citizens. By connecting science, health and sustainability in a tangible way, the project supports both academic growth and personal development.

This initiative reflects the power of collaboration between educators, regional leaders and community partners — all working together to plant the seeds of knowledge and nurture the next generation of agricultural thinkers.



Left: Carter C. Raymond Elementary 4-H members in Rapides enjoyed participating in The Seed’s Journey. Photo provided by Esther Boe. Right: Participants in a community leadership program studying agriculture participated in The Seed’s Journey. Photo provided by Charles Hebert



Youth participating in a school garden training enjoyed The Seed’s Journey. Photo provided by Lanette Hebert

”

How does our food grow? This is a question many of my students have when they are starting out in our garden program. I was excited to see The Seed’s Journey walking path at our recent garden training. This activity helped my students create their understanding of the plant’s life cycle by interacting with each other using visual aids. I can’t wait to use this activity with all of my students.

— Paula Guidry, environmental science lab teacher and 4-H school garden leader, L. Leo Judice Elementary

Old McDonald Had a Farm ... and So Does Brusly Elementary

The garden at the Brusly Barnyard is a hands-on component students enjoy. Photo by Stephanie Trimble

By Lanette Hebert and Ali LeJeune

Thanks to community partnerships, a shared commitment to agricultural education and the leadership of the West Baton Rouge Extension Office, Brusly Elementary has transformed from a small 4-H Cloverbud program into a hub for hands-on learning through its new Brusly Barnyard. Located on the school grounds, the Brusly Barnyard features an outdoor classroom, chicken coop, incubation stations and vegetable production beds. These outdoor learning labs serve as interactive learning tools for students, integrating agriculture into the elementary curriculum in meaningful and age-appropriate ways. The project was made possible by collaboration among school staff, 4-H volunteers, local sponsors and the leadership of their 4-H agent.

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Through the dedication of our BES staff, 4-H extension agents and community partners, the Brusly Barnyard has become more than a school project. It's a living lesson of teamwork, growth and the power of learning by doing for our kids. This project has brought joy to the BES campus and kids are excited to learn.

— West Baton Rouge school superintendent Chandler Smith

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A key contributor to the success of this project has been Jeannette Thomason, a generous local sponsor who invested \$45,000 in its development. Her support made possible the construction of a 25-by-25-foot covered pavilion, raised garden beds, a storage shed, fencing, gardening tools and other essential materials. The pavilion now serves as a dedicated space for outdoor learning, allowing students to engage with agriculture and nature throughout the year.

Thomason, a lifelong resident of Erwinville and a proud graduate of Port Allen High School, is a former student of the old Devall School. Though she did not attend college, she has long been an advocate for education and personal growth. Alongside her late husband, Allen, she founded several successful businesses and has remained a committed supporter of her community and youth development programs such as 4-H. Her generosity reflects a deep desire to give back to the place that shaped her.

"I hope students in the Brusly community will enjoy the gardens and chicken coop for many years to come, finding inspiration and learning through hands-on experiences in agriculture," Thomason said.

Brusly Elementary is also participating in the Seeds to Success: Louisiana Harvest of the Month program, which provides free, standards-aligned resources for students in kindergarten through second grade. These materials help educators incorporate produce-based lessons into their classrooms, further enriching the agricultural experience.

"I wanted to see children connect with the land, nurture life and learn where their

food comes from. It is truly rewarding to use the Brusly Barnyard to help lay down that foundation," shared teacher and 4-H club leader Stephanie Trimble.

Allison Decell, an LSU AgCenter Agriculture and Natural Resources agent, has been working in close partnership with the Brusly Barnyard initiative to enhance youth gardening education in West Baton Rouge Parish. Through their collaboration, they have utilized the parish greenhouse and Master Gardeners to provide transplants for school and community gardens. This joint effort has enriched the educational experience for participating youth and fostered a deeper understanding of plant science, sustainability and food systems.

Future enhancements to the Brusly Barnyard are already in motion, with plans to introduce a native pollinator garden. Students will learn about host plants that attract a variety of butterfly species and will have the opportunity to observe the metamorphosis process firsthand using butterfly enclosures in their classrooms.

What began as a small Cloverbud initiative has quickly evolved into a parishwide effort. Expansion plans are underway to bring Cloverbud programming to additional primary schools across West Baton Rouge Parish, offering hands-on agricultural lessons tailored to each school's unique needs and interests. The success of the Brusly Barnyard is a testament to what can be achieved when schools, volunteers, sponsors and educational programs work together. It's not just a farm — it's a growing community of learners, leaders and partners planting seeds for the future. ■



Top: Students enjoyed meeting barnyard animals. Middle: The outdoor learning labs at Brusly Elementary School are interactive learning tools integrating agriculture into curriculum. Bottom: Barnyard lessons are reinforced with classroom lessons. Photos by Stephanie Trimble



4-H Program Impact Report

Youth Development Numbers

4-H members and participants:

149,143



Increase:

59%

4-H volunteers:

11,965



Increase:

14%

4-H members in volunteer and community service: **44,466**

Louisiana 4-H Foundation Financial Report (2024-2025 FY)

Income

Contributions	\$593,803.81
Program Activities	\$361,780.11
Annuity	\$56,442.23
LSU Foundation	\$216,810.96
Scholarships	\$100,000
Total Income	\$1,328,837.11

Expense

Foundation Operating ..	\$50,282.74
Fundraising	\$12,833.79
Program Services	\$542,862.04
LSU Foundation	\$202,386.89
Total Expense	\$808,365.46

Beginning Assets
\$6,840,812.48

Ending Assets
\$7,674,789.63

Change in Assets
\$833,977.15



What Louisiana youth say about 4-H

64% feel 4-H influences college and career readiness

58% feel the influence of 4-H on post-secondary pathway support

87% had the opportunity to explore things they might want to do for a career through 4-H

78% know employers expect them to do a job well because of their 4-H involvement

77% serve as volunteers through 4-H

More **youth.**
More **community.**
More **ready.**

www.LSUAgCenter.com

www.LSUAgCenter.com/topics/kids_teens

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The LSU AgCenter and LSU provide equal opportunities in programs and employment.
The 4-H name and emblem are protected under 18 USC 707.

