

Promoting Positive Youth Development

Young people today face unprecedented social, educational, and economic challenges. Rising loneliness, declining academic performance, and uncertainty about the future threaten to leave an entire generation unprepared for tomorrow's workforce.

Land-grant universities—through 4-H and the Cooperative Extension System—are uniquely positioned to lead the way in building a ready generation that is resilient, skilled, and community-minded. Without expanded investment in these areas, millions of youth will miss out on opportunities to develop the skills, confidence, and community support they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

4-H is building a ready generation that is:

- 2x more likely to live life with purpose
- 2x more likely to be a leader
- 4x more likely to give back to the community
- 4x more likely to feel competent

What's at stake:

- **Youth well-being**: 53% of Gen Z reports feeling lonely, and 52% feel they are failing at life's goals.
- **Educational setbacks**: Chronic school absenteeism has doubled since 2019, and teens' math and reading scores have dropped to 50-year lows.
- **Workforce gaps**: 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet, yet employers say graduates lack real-world skills such as adaptability and creative thinking.
- **Community vitality**: Without strong youth engagement, rural and urban communities alike risk losing the next generation of leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs.

Increased investment in agricultural research, education, and Extension can improve the lives of all Americans by:

- **Preparing youth for success in the future workforce**
 - **Problem**: Over 104.00 job openings in the food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and environmental sectors are expected annually between 2025 – 2030 for individuals with college degrees. But the next generation is entering a rapidly changing economy without the necessary life and leadership skills.
 - **Land-grant Solution**: Expand 4-H programs that teach real-world problem-solving, communication, and teamwork while connecting youth to careers in food, agriculture, and natural resources.
 - **Benefit**: Build a pipeline of skilled, purpose-driven young professionals ready to strengthen America's economy and food systems.
- **Promoting youth engagement with their communities**
 - **Problem**: Youth isolation and civic disconnect threaten youth mental health and community succession planning.
 - **Land-grant Solution**: Create safe virtual and physical spaces where youth can belong, develop confidence, and contribute to their communities.
 - **Benefit**: Empathetic, civically engaged young leaders contributing to community success.

- **Cultivating a thriving next generation**

- Problem: Many youth—particularly in underserved rural and urban areas—lack access to consistent mentoring and hands-on learning opportunities.
- Land-grant Solution: Scale 4-H outreach through partnerships with schools, employers, and local organizations to reach 10 million youth annually by 2030.
- Benefit: Ensure every young person can discover their spark, find purpose, and thrive.

Every \$1 invested in a 4-H'er results in a \$40 return in economic benefit to youth, their families, and communities¹. Expanded investment in 4-H and Cooperative Extension will enable these programs to prepare 10 million ready, young people who are healthy, productive, and engaged.

¹ Finster, M. et al. (2023) Exploratory Cost-Benefit Study of 4-H.