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4-H in the 70's

CAN THE 4-H PROGRAM for 9- to 19-year-old youth, directed by the Agricultural Extension Service of the University of California reach the black, brown, red, yellow and white youth in the low-income areas of California? There have been some successes and some failures. Those directing the program believe that the learn-by-doing approach, with the assistance of professional Extension staff people of the land-grant universities, can continue to serve a growing number of youth leaders in the present clientele and at the same time expand the program to be of service to more low-income youth.

In California, membership in standard 4-H clubs has grown in 1971 from 55,000 to 61,000 members. In addition, 20,000 other youth are being reached through the 4-H ENEP (4-H Expanded Nutrition Education Program), in informal groups where the major emphasis is upon nutrition and related subjects. Most youth in the standard 4-H clubs are from white, middle-class families who live primarily in small towns and suburbs—with about 20 per cent from the farm. The 4-H ENEP youth are primarily black and brown; they live in the low-income areas of our major population centers.

The new program direction of 4-H relates to major missions of the USDA and the land-grant university system: conservation of natural resources; control of environmental pollution; alleviation of hunger and malnutrition; development of community resources; expanding jobs and careers; increasing numbers of volunteers; and improving international relations.

Pilot projects have applied the California 4-H approach to the needs, interests, and abilities of youth in low-income rural and urban families. In 1970-71, it was discovered that youth in the 4-H ENEP program in 14 counties had serious doubts that 4-H would be an appropriate program for them—until they were exposed to the 4-H experience. Then those youth often changed their opinion

of 4-H, and wanted to belong. The rural image of 4-H often causes apprehension on the part of urban youth; but this too can be changed through experience.

Thirteen counties, in addition to the 14 counties involved in 4-H ENEP, are developing programs for low-income rural and urban families. These have included Afro-American and Latin American cultural programs in Alameda County; sponsorship by existing 4-H clubs of two clubs for low-income Mexican-Americans in Glenn and Colusa counties. Two new areas of low-income 4-H clubs have been set up adjacent to existing clubs in Napa County. Clubs have been developed at Hollister in San Benito County for low-income children of farm laborers.

A quality of living program in Riverside and San Bernardino counties reached 526 Mexican-Americans, 412 blacks, and 36 whites from low-income areas, but only three small teen-age clubs of Mexican-Americans were organized, and one small club of 8- to 12-year-old blacks. San Joaquin, Tulare, Ventura, and Yolo counties also tried pilot programs for low-income youth adjacent to existing 4-H clubs; and a 4-H money-management project was set up with San Francisco Youth for Service.

These pilot projects (now mostly discontinued) revealed several difficulties with developing and continuing leadership, and revealed the need for a core curriculum at the start of a program, rather than starting with a search for needs and interests of these young people without advance preparation of materials.

Other counties have also attempted to serve a low-income clientele with limited success. The 4-H ENEP program appears to be creating more opportunities for expansion of 4-H to low-income people in those 14 counties where the professional staff is working on 4-H ENEP. This movement can be expected to influence the 4-H program in all counties by demonstrating innovative methods of reaching low income families.