

The History of 4-H in El Dorado County

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Most have heard of 4-H and some have had the opportunity to participate in the program. But how did it start? And how did it become one of the largest youth development organizations in the country? We have a long and interesting history that is rooted in agriculture.

A movement in the mid 1800's began to bring publicly funded agricultural and technical colleges to the people. This idea became reality with the Morrill Act of 1862. In a nation torn by secession and Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed a visionary law that laid the cornerstone of public higher education in California and nationwide. The Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 gave federal public lands to states, allotting 30,000 acres for each senator and representative. States were encouraged to sell these "land grants" to raise money for new public universities that would educate Americans in agriculture, science and mechanical arts.

California legislators took the federal government up on its offer in 1864, and the first buildings of the University of California were completed in 1868 on the banks of Strawberry Creek, in the Berkeley hills.

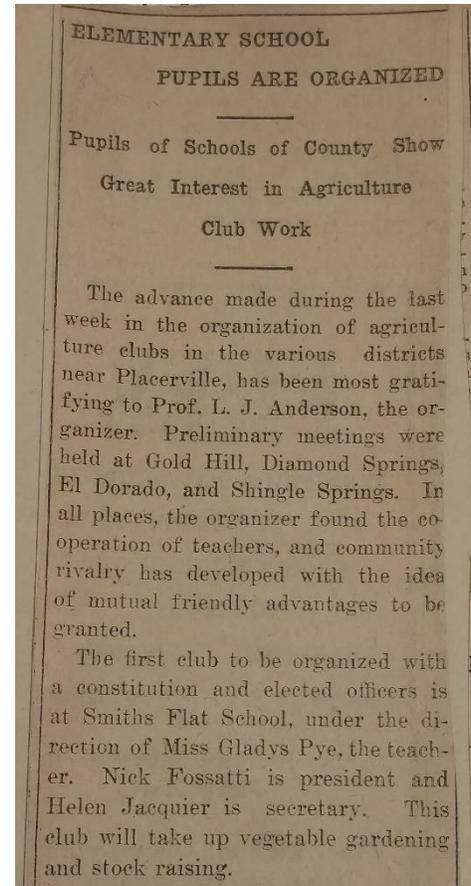
Further expansion of connecting lay people to universities occurred when funding was approved for Agricultural Experiment Stations through the passage of the Hatch Act in 1887. The universities and experiment stations focused on applied research techniques to find ways to increase crop yield and solve agricultural problems. In California, one of these stations was the University Farm, established in Davis in 1906 as a teaching farm for UC Berkeley students, would later become UC Davis. The Citrus Experiment Station, founded in Riverside in 1907 to support California's developing citrus industry, would become UC Riverside.

By 1914 the passage of the Smith-Leaver Act began the Cooperative Extension Service, which connected every county to the University and research stations. Those Extension Agents, took the latest research from the universities and experiment stations, and began extending that knowledge to the local community. What's surprising is that youth in these communities caught on faster than their parents. They were enamored by the new and innovative ideas. Local Extension Agents gave them small plots of land to test the new tilling, watering, or fertilizing techniques and soon those plots were out performing their parents! This was all happening the same time that local clubs called "The Tomato Club" or "The Corn Growing Club" were becoming popular. Extension agents began to see the power of youth, their excitement to learn, and their personal growth when they taught others. By 1912 the titles of 4-H Clubs were being used, along with the logo of the clover with H's on it.

In El Dorado County, Dr. J L Anderson, an Agriculture Teacher with El Dorado County High School developed the first agriculture clubs in 1918. Smith Flat was the first club to create a constitution and elect officers with Camino, Diamond Springs, Gold Hill, Rescue and Kelsey following shortly. By March 1918 there were 10 agriculture clubs throughout the county.

The Mountain Democrat newspaper had regular reports on the progress of the clubs starting in 1918. The clubs were created to interest and teach the young people, age 10 and up, the vital farm problems through University guest speakers and field trips to Davis University. Parents and citizens were urged to cooperate in making these clubs successful. The work was closely correlated with important war measures as it taught efficiency on the farm directly to the younger generation. And, success of the younger generation caused the older generation to take interest and learn. The High School Agriculture Department along with the Farm Advisor Office worked to further develop the farming interest in the county and soon there were agriculture clubs in each of the school districts.

So much has changed since then, yet so much has stayed the same. While we've expanded the reach of our organization by increasing the types of projects we offer, we still see personal growth in youth who teach others. The model of 4-H has been researched and it shows youth who participate have higher positive outcomes than those who don't. Our roots connect us to agriculture and the Land Grant University system. We are proud of where we came from, and excited about where we can go.



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