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The 4-Hers Focus on STEM

4-H participants do well in school and like science.

Story by Dale Smith

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Back in 1914, the Smith-Lever Act established the Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service, which sends out knowledge and programming from MU to the citizens of Missouri. As part of that mission, one of Extension's best-known programs, Missouri 4-H, engages more than 100,000 youngsters in hands-on projects that teach various subjects and life skills such as cooperation, leadership and decision-making, says Ina Linville, BS Ag '77, MS '78, PhD '01, youth program director at Extension's 4-H Center for Youth Development.



Ina Linville says 4-H programs help prepare youngsters for STEM careers. Photo courtesy of Ina Linville.

Although 4-H was founded early in the 20th century,

it remains relevant today as a way of passing along scientific knowledge to young people, Linville says. Industry demand for graduates trained in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) professions remains steady, and these skills are required in modern economies.

Tufts University researchers have followed 4-H participants since 2002 in an effort to quantify the program's effects. The study of more than 6,400 adolescents from diverse backgrounds across the United States is funded by land-grant universities and the [national 4-H Council](#).

When it comes to education and the sciences, 4-H participants are at the high end, Linville says. Compared to similar people who do not participate, they report higher grades and engagement in school, are nearly twice as likely to plan on going to college and are more likely to pursue STEM careers.

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