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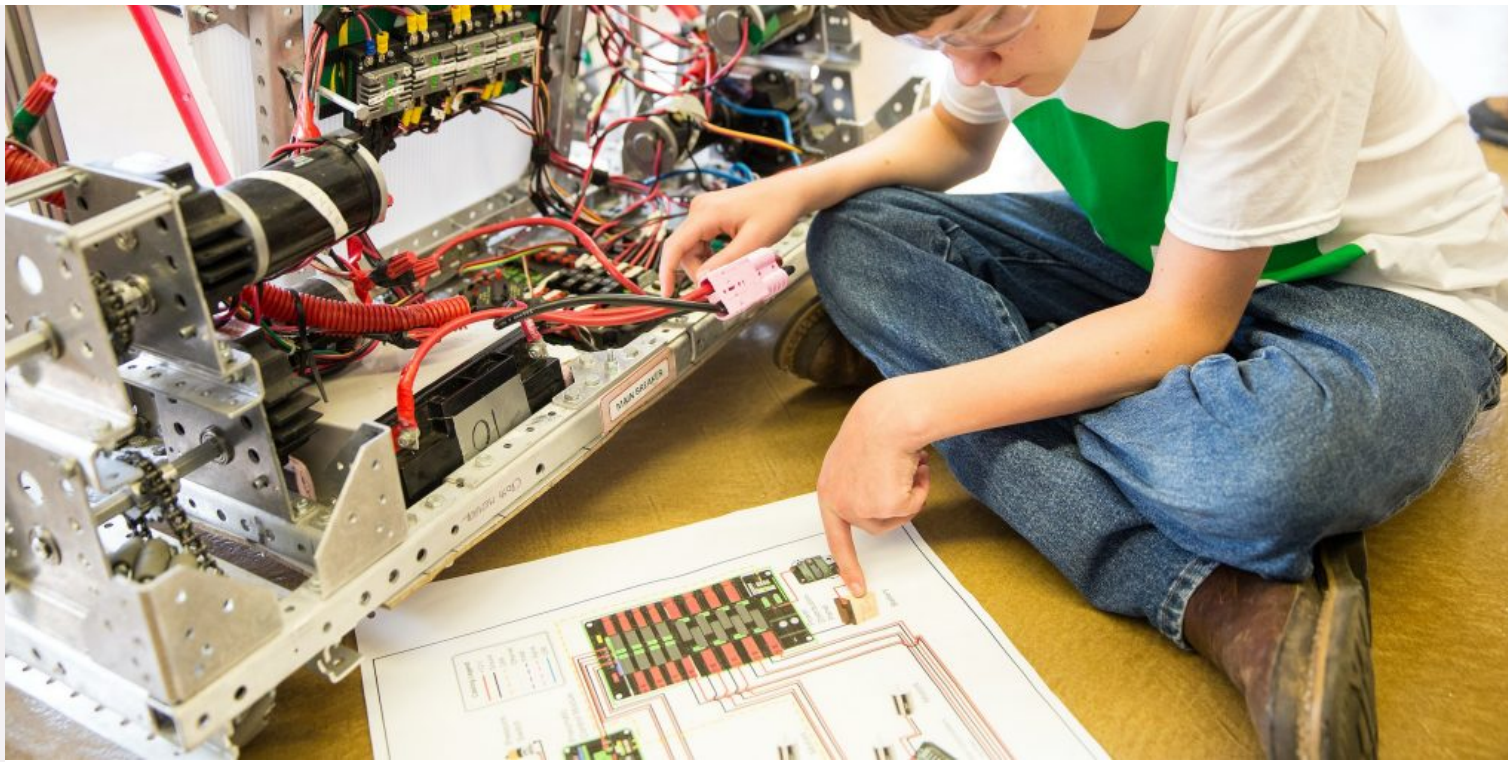
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4-H continues renowned learning opportunities in digital environment

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia 4-H has found new and engaging ways to educate youth through online activities, video conferencing, telephone guidance, and more,” said Jeremy Johnson, state 4-H leader.





4-Her constructs a robot.

While COVID-19 has changed how [4-H](#) has traditionally delivered rich learning experiences, young people are still learning by doing through a variety of activities that

emphasize 4-H's philosophy of youth development. Camps are being held digitally, education programs and being delivered remotely, and at-home learning activities are taking place across the state.

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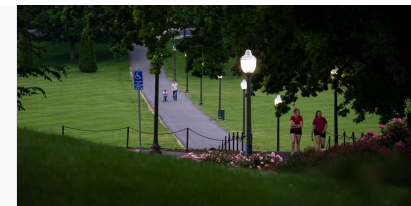
“4-H is often seen as the fabric of positive youth development and during times like these our role in helping young people succeed is more important than ever,” said Jeremy Johnson, state leader of Virginia 4-H. “Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia 4-H has found new and engaging ways to educate youth through online activities, video conferencing, telephone guidance, and more.”

The learning experiences are continuing in an online format, including 4-H camps being hosted digitally at no cost. Each of the six 4-H centers is hosting a series of virtual day camps that embody 4-H’s positive development programs.

The first-ever Virginia statewide 4-H camp, “Camp Across the Commonwealth,” is being held June 22-27, with each of

the 4-H Centers participating in the unique camp session.

Individual 4-H centers are offering their programming



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will hold employee-
focused town hall on
June 25



Virginia Tech
researcher working to
provide clean water
to Appalachia



from June through July. The camp sessions feature a wide range of activities designed to both learn and have fun virtually. Campers will have opportunities to participate in talent shows, flag ceremonies, virtual dances, recreation activities, evening programs, and more depending on the 4-H center.

All camps are free; however, 4-H Centers are selling t-shirts with the option to donate to support 4-H camps and activities. For information on sessions, [refer to your local 4-H camp webpage](#).

Learning from the comfort of the home

With statewide school closures, many traditional 4-H in-school enrichment programs were canceled, but Virginia Cooperative Extension agents still found ways to continue education at home, such as Tara Brent, 4-H agent in Northumberland County.

Brent partnered with four grade levels across two schools to deliver the missed programs virtually using Zoom. To ensure that as many youths are reached as possible while accounting for differing levels of internet connectivity,



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research program in
honor of Juneteenth

youth participated in the program live or watched the recording that the teachers post in their Google Classroom.

Programs included a Virginia Ag Literacy week activity, an embryology game, the butterfly life cycle, watersheds, animal coverings, and an exercise on the reduce, reuse and recycle.

“When I first had the idea to develop 4-H home lesson kits, I spoke with Jonathan Putt, Director of Operations for the Boys and Girls Club of the Northern Neck. Partnering with their meal distribution was a perfect fit, as these 4-H kits allowed their staff to build Club on the Go bags for each family,” Brent said. “Around 70% of the youth served by the Boys and Girls Club of the Northern Neck does not have access to the internet at home, so without this partnership, these families would be missing out on 4-H programming.”

STEM....to go

When Prince William County 4-H Program Assistant Kristen Saul learned of a local food distribution day, the

wheels began turning to see if activity kits could be included for recipient families.

They were.

“Our focus on deciding which activities to offer was based on the ability to provide all of the materials needed so that families would not need anything additional to complete their activity,” said MaryBeth Lerch, a 4-H agent in Prince William County. “Because we had materials on hand left from our day camp activities from last year, we decided to offer kits to explore wind energy through windmill winches and simpler design of a pinwheel.”

More than 200 kits were distributed at the Georgetown Park Community. Additionally, 200 kits were recently were delivered to Action in Community Through Service.





4-Her picks up a STEM kit in Prince William County.

Virtual livestock shows

While COVID-19 and the associated restrictions impacted 4-H and FFA youth livestock exhibitors across Virginia, and their Extension Agents, Future Farmers of America Advisors, Organizational Volunteers, and families, reacted accordingly with resilience, perseverance, and creativity.

While most had never organized or participated in a virtual livestock show, they embraced the opportunity and accepted the challenge - more than 350 Virginia 4-H and FFA members have participated in local Virtual Livestock

Shows since April 30.

Almost 600 head of livestock were entered and exhibited in seven shows held across the Commonwealth, filling the void created with every local and district spring youth livestock show was canceled as a result of COVID-19.

Additionally, two of these shows - the [Central VA Livestock Show](#) and the [Augusta Market Animal Show](#), organized online auctions to help youth exhibitors recoup some of the project expense that would normally be captured through a traditional in-person Premium Auction held after their shows.

Organizational leaders at the state and local level have leveraged countless hours and learned new skills to make these events possible for our Virginia Youth Livestock Program participants. There are currently another five

events either accepting entries or in the planning stages to replace county fairs or other canceled shows.

Bzzzzzzz - what's that sound?

That's the sound of the Virginia Beach 4-H Foragers Beekeeping Club meeting virtually every month. In addition to handling standard club business, Sarah Farley, 4-H agent, and a volunteer 4-H leader led the club in a Virginia 4-H computer science coding activity. 4-H Club members applied their knowledge to decode honey bee words and answered questions about honey bee topics.

'4-H Crafternoons'

Household items have multiple uses, becoming the foundation for "4-H Crafternoons," said Kathryn Alstat, senior 4-H Extension agent. These crafts are all capable of being done with common household items by reusing old t-shirt, flower pressing, magazine magic, and more.

Alstat is also producing 4-H @ Home Activity Sheets and is distributing activity kits to her local food bank. In all,

Alstat has distributed more than 30 STEM activity kits with all pertinent supplies over the last month - including dropping off Mother's Day craft kits.

“I enjoy connecting with kids, talking to them over Zoom, and continuing to be able to teach them something new. I chose crafts using everyday objects because it was something fun and inexpensive. I usually try the crafts first, then go over the instructions with the kids,” Alstat said. “I share what went wrong, what I had to adapt to, what was difficult or fun. I was pleased when one boy who participated in last week's session said he was going to try all of the crafts I highlighted.”

At home with horses

The pandemic of Covid-19 shifted the ability for the VA 4-H Horse Ambassadors to meet their initial goals to serve the state for their remaining term, so with the call for online activities, several of them grabbed at the opportunity to not only create activities but added a video component to serve in a virtual capacity. They coined their

weekly series “4-H at Home with Horses” and [all episodes are posted online.](#)

Also, the Southeast District Ambassadors are working on

the establishment of a Southeast District Youth Horse Council using Zoom to meet and discuss plans. Another Ambassador is using her skills to help complete finishing touches on the state Horsemanship Skills Level 1 video.

On March 7, the Ambassadors [won a national award](#), the Youth Equine Industry Connections Award, for their service and leadership to the equine industry.

“The group of Ambassadors is unstoppable! We are proud of their accomplishments and leadership,” said Sandy Arnold, youth equine extension associate.





Audrey Allen, member of Washington County 4-H Saddle Club, and Virginia 4-H Horse ambassador, in episode one of "At Home With Horses."

Man's best friend

As people spend more time with their furry friends, Extension agent Lenah Nguyen is leading a seven-part series exploring dog training, animal behavior, and career-related to dog training with the topics covering agility, scent training, rally, trick training, service dog training, animal behavior research, and training herding dogs. The sessions are presented by Erica

Feuerbacher, assistant professor in the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences, and students from the Virginia Tech Applied Animal Behavior and Welfare Lab.

“One of my favorite lessons was the scent training lesson in which we learned about the work that lab is doing to scent train dogs to help with conservation projects such as finding spotted lanternfly eggs,” Nguyen said. “We have heard from several adult volunteers who have participated in the series and plan to continue dog projects with their 4-H clubs once their 4-H members are allowed to meet face to face again.”

[Sessions are Wednesdays at 2 p.m.](#)

STEAM powered

Jeff Karow, program assistant, has been working with his 4-H agent at the local middle to provide simple projects for youth to do at home. Normally focused on technology, each project now consists of items found in the pantry or around the house. On Earth Day, a pizza box was turned into a solar oven, cooking Smore’s and pizza crackers.

“Normally we do these projects in-person and focused more on technology, but with the pandemic, it has become more about keeping the youth-focused on things that they can do with minimal technology,” Karow said. “I

also try to incorporate the previous week's experiments or the items we made into future lessons and show them that we can reuse items.”

Growing at home

To keep in contact with Cople Elementary School's fourth-grade students in Westmoreland County, 4-H agents created tomato seed starting kits for distribution.

These kits contained a packet of seeds, potting mix, an instruction sheet for starting seeds in the milk cartons distributed with student meals, an Extension publication about starting seeds for a garden. Kits were delivered to the school and were distributed on a work packet pick up day.





RVA 4-H JMG at Home Science is a program geared towards a home school group with an interest in gardening and science. Virtual classes are delivered weekly and youth engage in home gardening activities where they have to prepare meals with items found in the garden or create an item using materials found in the garden.

Conferencing: Social distancing edition

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the annual spring conference of the Virginia Association of 4-H Volunteer Leaders was one of the first events moved to an online format by 4-H.

Chad N. Proudfoot, 4-H organizational specialist, and Kelly Rose, Dickenson County 4-H Extension agent, offered to try putting on an alternative event - a virtual volunteer conference.

Due to the ease of access to the sessions, registration was opened up to 4-H volunteers from other states. The conference, which usually has around 60 attendees, reached 511 people from 23 states.

“The mission of Cooperative Extension has always centered around adapting to meet the needs of those served, and taking the resources and knowledge of the land-grant university to the people,” Proudfoot said. “I’m proud that in 2020 we are still able to maintain that level of adaptability to meet the changing needs of the people we serve.”

Additional activities or events

- Sewing fills an important need in society and multiple 4-H agents and educators have helped fill this void. Rosemary Life, a 4-H youth educator, started a mask sewing effort where 4-H members and other volunteers sew masks for community businesses. Life creates sewing kits, containing a sewing machine, video instructions, fabric, and

other supplies needed.

- Jen Matosky, 4-H & ANR program associate, created a 4-H mask project in Highland County. 4-H members made masks for their community members, and for anyone that couldn't sew, 4-H members cut out fabric to help with the process. More than 50 masks were made and distributed throughout the county for local emergency responders, medical personnel, and businesses to use to stay safe and healthy.
- The Nokesville Equestrian Club hosts weekly challenges via Zoom. Each week a different member comes up with a horse-related activity that can be done at home with supplies on-hand. Hippology team members meeting via zoom every week and members take turns doing the lesson plans.
- A Poultry Service Learning Project, led by Nguyen, in which kids raise broilers and layers, will donate the resulting chicken and eggs to local food banks. More than 45 kids are expected to participate and it is anticipated that more than 2,780 eggs and 1,200 pounds of meat will be donated by

November 2020.

- 4-H members Faith Dellinger and Makayla Hoffman, who also represent youth on the Extension Leadership Council, conducted Facebook Live sessions for special "Learning by Doing" activities in honor of Mother's Day.

– *Written by Max Esterhuizen*

CONTACT:

[Zeke Barlow](#)

[540-231-5417](#)

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