

4-H and World War I

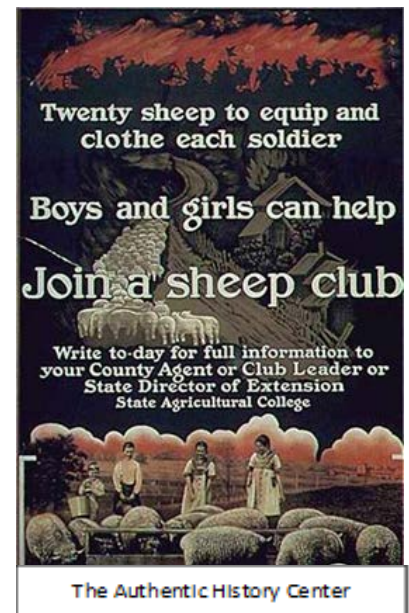
The Smith-Lever Act, passed in 1914, created the Cooperative Extension Service, a nationwide system to bring the research from each state's land grant university to their communities. It also planted the seed for the educational movement that would be called 4-H.

As described by Marilyn and Thomas Wessel in *4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980*:
Before the war, club work had become a national movement without a national character. Assistance from national and state leaders had not penetrated the form or structure of club work at the local level. Consequently, clubs organized in a variety of ways and some had little organization at all.

In 1916, the year before America entered WWI, there were 169,000 boys and girls engaged in 4-H clubs and by the war's end in 1918 more than 500,000 were engaged in 4-H clubs. Additionally, from July 1, 1917 to July 1, 1918 the amount of county leaders increased from 161 to 1,002.

Nearly all Americans were impacted by World War I, volunteering to serve in many ways. The 4-H clubs sold Liberty Bonds, collected peach pits to be used to make filters in gas masks, and most importantly by helped to increase fiber and food production.

The need to feed our soldiers during WWI required that as country we grow more food and find ways to preserve and conserve the food that we were currently growing. It was critical that our country increase our supply of wheat, sugar, and red meat. The government relied on Cooperative Extension for assistance within their local communities. Working with the existing 4-H clubs, they raised sugar beets along with sorghums to replace sugar cane, increased sheep and pig production, increased the number of school and home gardens, and led canning demonstrations. During this period, food consumption dropped 15% without the need for required rationing.



Responding to their country's needs during and after WWI 4-H clubs, supported by county and state staff, provided community education and change that solidified their relevance.

Today, there are more than 6 million youth are enrolled in 4-H clubs across the U.S., with support from more than 500,000 volunteers and 3,500 4-H professionals.

Wessel, Thomas and Wessel, Marilyn. *4-H: An American Idea 1900-1980*. National 4-H History Preservation Program, 2016. eBook Collection, http://4-hhistorypreservation.com/eMedia/eBooks/4-H_An_American_Idea_1900-1980.pdf

True, Alfred Charles. *Agricultural Extension Work in the United States 1785-1923*. National 4-H History Preservation Program, 2016. eBook Collection, http://4-hhistorypreservation.com/eMedia/eBooks/A_History_of_Ag_Ext_Work_in_US_1785-1923.pdf

The Authentic History Center: www.authentichistory.com/1914-1920/2-homefront/2-posters/