The mission of University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension 4-H is to empower youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnerships with caring adults. More specifically, 4-H in Nebraska has intentionally targeted two signature outcomes in 2010: 4-H Science and Career Development. To assess the success of Nebraska 4-H in reaching these outcomes, a mixed methods study was conducted during 2010. Approximately 1,300 youth from across the state contributed their responses. In addition, Nebraska 4-H has evaluated the impact 4-H has had in post-secondary decisions in twelfth grade students. The results shared in this report illustrate the impact Nebraska 4-H is making in the lives of young people in Nebraska.

POST-SECONDARY DECISIONS

The projects offered through 4-H often serve as a catalyst in assisting youth in discovering and making decisions about their post-secondary education. It was found that 95% of high school seniors surveyed between 2007-2010 who were enrolled in 4-H are pursuing higher education after high school, with 80% staying in Nebraska to receive their post-secondary education and 24% planning to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). It was also reported that 62% of seniors had discussed post-secondary options with their 4-H leader or 4-H staff and 65% of seniors felt that their 4-H project impacted their college decision.

In response to how 4-H influenced her future plans, a high School Senior from Lincoln County said, “I was a Junior Leader and feel that the experiences helped me realize that I love working with children. Now I am majoring in Education.”

A separate study, which surveyed over 600 college students enrolled in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) and College of Engineering at UNL, found that 40% of respondents were past 4-H’ers. It was also found that 4-H influenced their decision to pursue a degree in science, engineering, and technology, and when compared to non-4-H youth, past 4-Her’s were somewhat more likely to pursue a career in their home state.
4-H SCIENCE

4-H Science, science, engineering, technology, and applied math, reaches youth through hands on learning experiences to encourage young minds to be proficient leaders in science. 4-H Science programs in Nebraska provide youth opportunities to learn about how science, engineering, and technology impact their everyday lives. Seventy-two percent of survey respondents are currently applying science, engineering, and technology in their 4-H project or program. 4-H in Nebraska has made a commitment to provide youth opportunities that will foster their interests and support their exploration of majors and careers in 4-H Science. This has led to 81% of respondents to think a career in science, engineering, and technology would be fun!

In general, it has been found that women have a lower interest in science, engineering, and technology when compared to men. However, in Nebraska, both male and female 4-Her’s equally thought that science, engineering, and technology would be important in their future job; 87% of males and 85% of females agreed or strongly agreed that 4-H Science would be important in the future.

A 4-Her from Buffalo County enrolled in the Beef project explains that she uses science, engineering, and technology in her project by “using a computer program to figure our calf rations.”

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Nebraska 4-H recognizes the importance of future decisions and therefore strives to provide youth opportunities where they will explore careers related to their 4-H projects, encourage them to pursue higher education, and expose them to entrepreneurship opportunities. By participating in club projects and activities youth are able to connect their interests to future careers and build skills necessary for pursuing those experiences. With this being said, 94% of youth surveyed know careers related to their 4-H project, 77% know a college major related to their project, and 87% can picture their 4-H project as a business. In addition, 96% of youth respondents are learning skills through 4-H that they could use in a future job!

A 4-H member of an independent club for 10 years said two skills she learned through 4-H that have had the biggest impact in her life are “skills needed to follow directions and skills to interact with peers and adults.” These are key skills needed for any career.