



NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION

Students from across the country gather for networking and education at the National FFA Convention & Expo.

The Kids Are All Right

Legacy organizations are positioning students for success in a rapidly changing agricultural landscape

By Suzanne Wright

WITH 6 MILLION YOUNG people participating in programs across all 50 states, 4-H is the largest youth development organization in the country. It was founded to instruct rural youth in improved farming and farm-homemaking practices through cooperative education at land grant universities.

The National FFA Organization, long known as Future Farmers of America,

boasts 1 million members in grades 5-12 and college across all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It also focuses on preparing kids for careers in agriculture, food systems and natural resources.

4-H's core programs "remain popular because they connect youth to their community and the land," says Jill Bramble, president and CEO of the National 4-H Council. "As the world of work continues to evolve, so do we."

And that alone is a tremendous challenge. A Dell Technologies Research



Jill Bramble
NATIONAL 4-H COUNCIL

report from 2017 predicted that 85 percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 hadn't been created yet.

As the agricultural field becomes increasingly high-tech and interconnected, it requires a well-rounded skill set. Both 4-H and FFA have pivoted their programming accordingly.

FUTURE-PROOFING FARMING

The biggest shift has been from a primarily production-agriculture focus

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Beyond Ready to Take on the World

4-H can change the trajectory of a person's life. Leaders like Krysta Harden and Chancellor Robert Jones know this firsthand. With limitless learning opportunities, 4-H opens eyes and minds. Being a lifelong learner goes beyond projects and competitions, and is rooted in the experiences available through 4-H.

As former 4-H'ers, Krysta and Robert know that every child needs a place to flourish, to become versatile, adaptable and engaged—making them Beyond Ready for whatever path they choose.



Krysta Harden

- President & CEO, US Dairy Export Council
- Former United States Deputy Secretary of Agriculture (2013–2016)
- Georgia 4-H Alum



Chancellor Robert Jones

- 10th Chancellor of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- American Crop Physiology Scientist
- Georgia 4-H Alum



Learn more at
4-H.org/BeyondReady | [#BeyondReady](https://twitter.com/BeyondReady)

4-H is the youth development organization of our nation's Cooperative Extension System and USDA.



“There are many pathways for students to choose from that align with their passions.”

— CHRISTINE WHITE,
chief program officer, National FFA

to a broader scope that includes science, technology, engineering, business and leadership aspects of agriculture.

“4-H is at the forefront of integrating emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, robotics and drones,” Bramble says. “These innovations are transforming the future of agriculture and food systems.”

4-H launched the Beyond Ready workforce readiness initiative last October with a goal of reaching 10 million youth annually by 2030, preparing rural, suburban and urban students with the skills to tackle complex global challenges in sustainable agriculture and resource management.

“Youth need to possess leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking and time-management skills,” Bramble says. “They also need to learn how to leverage social media and marketing techniques to connect with consumers, employees, donors and other stakeholders.”

FFA has introduced more virtual and hybrid learning options, and updated competitive events by collaborating with industry partners for opportunities such as the National Turfgrass Science Invitational. FFA also offers international travel opportunities for its state officers to expose them to global agriculture. The organization is also expanding its efforts to create a more inclusive environment.

“We’ve made significant strides over the past decade to adapt to a rapidly changing world while staying true to our mission of preparing students for leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education,” says Christine White, FFA’s chief program officer.

YOUTH ARE ENERGIZED

Parents may worry about agriculture’s perceived difficulties or lack of prestige, but it’s a vibrant sector of the economy. And the employment outlook is strong: A 2024 report from Purdue University found that there are currently two open positions in agriculture for every qualified candidate.



Christine White
NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION

“With more than 350 careers in agriculture, there are many pathways for students to choose from that align with their passions,” White says.

Some students are inspired by entrepreneurial opportunities, while others are drawn to careers in financial literacy, marketing and supply-chain management.

“Agriculture resonates with this generation’s desire to have careers with meaningful outcomes,” White says. “They can see how their work directly impacts people, whether it’s improving food access, advancing environmental solutions or creating technologies that shape the future.”

Katie Culbert is a National 4-H Youth in Action winner and first-year student at Harvard University, where she’s pursuing a dual major in biology and political science.

“I don’t think people realize that this industry is the world’s largest employer and impacts lives on a huge scale,” Culbert says. “I plan to pursue a career in agriculture because it means I will have the opportunity to make a direct impact on society and do my part to support food security.”

Culbert is most excited by opportunities in research and legislation and sees her pursuits as a continuation of her family’s traditions.

“My father and grandfather are both physicians. But my great-grandfather and my great-great-grandfather were farmers,” she says. “I think my career will bring me full circle because the foundation of good health is food.”



NATIONAL 4-H COUNCIL
National 4-H Youth in Action winner Katie Culbert is pursuing a dual major in biology and political science at Harvard University.